

**Hollywood¹ and Youth:
From the Nickelodeon to the American New Wave^{*}**

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In 1967, two films were released that would come to be perceived as signifying the arrival of an American “New Wave”: *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn) and *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols). In style, they seemed closer to European—and particularly French—New Wave cinema of the late 1950s and 1960s. It also appeared to critics, both at the time and later, that they had a particular appeal to youth. This article will argue that the relationship between Hollywood and American youth was by no means new in 1967. It began with anxieties over the influence of movies on young people. At a later stage, it developed into attempts to appeal to youth as a distinctive part of a mass audience. Finally, it will be argued that regarding the American New Wave films of 1967 as a conscious appeal to a youthful audience is much too simplistic a view.

Cinema and the conceptualization of “youth” as a distinctive stage of life between childhood and adulthood began almost simultaneously. In 1904, Clark University psychologist G. Stanley Hall published a two-volume book entitled *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education*.² Hall not only coined but propagated the term “adolescence,” arguing that somewhere between childhood and adulthood, each human individual undergoes a period of “storm and stress” characterized by mood swings, risky behavior and conflict with parents. To Hall and other Progressive Era thinkers, this was the moment when young people were most likely to “go wrong” and find themselves on the other side of the law.

A year after Hall’s book appeared, the first nickelodeon was established in Pittsburgh. While most history books associate the birth of American cinema with the successful showing of motion pictures at Koster and Bial’s music hall in New York City in April 1896, for the first nine years of its existence cinema in the United States had no public space it could call its own. Early films were shown in vaudeville theaters, opera houses, cafés, storefronts,

* To cite this article: Melvyn Stokes, “Hollywood and Youth: From the Nickelodeon to the American New Wave”, in Marimar Azcona and Penny Starfield, eds., “Youth in American Film”, *Film Journal*, 2 (2013). URL: <http://filmjournal.org/fj2-stokes>.

¹ “Hollywood” is used here as shorthand description of the American cinema industry which, of course, began well before the place Hollywood became a major focus of filmmaking activity.

² G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York: D. Appleton, 2 vols., 1904).

summer parks, churches and church halls, YMCAs, department stores and schools.³ On the whole, these first films represented what Tom Gunning has called the “cinema of attractions.”⁴ They were less likely to be attempts at telling a narrative story than travelogues, news reports, local interest features and films showing prize-fights. The introduction of the nickelodeon in 1905 not only gave American cinema for the first time its own fixed public spaces (there would be 10,000 nickelodeons in the US by 1910⁵), it also signaled the beginning of the turn towards Gunning’s “cinema of narrative integration,” in which nearly all motion pictures would revolve around story-telling.⁶

The coincidence of the birth of the idea of “adolescence” with the advent and rapid diffusion of nickelodeons quickly led to the emergence of a public discourse surrounding the potential dangers of young people being exposed to the allegedly bad influence of the films they saw in nickelodeons. As Lucy Robertson Jones, chair of the Municipal Women’s League in Yorktown, Virginia, observed in 1914:

about a quarter of the films from which the ordinary programs are made up are such as to degrade the taste or corrupt the morals of young people. These films introduce them to a world of chicanery and intrigue, of horseplay and gambling house brawls, of infidelity and "forced embraces" (to use the language of the scenarios), of bomb throwing, suicide and incendiarism.⁷

Although there had been previous moral panics dealing with the impact of other media forms, such as the dime novel, on children in general, some writers of the 1910s were beginning to argue that cinema was particularly dangerous because of its imagistic character and its potential impact on adolescents. In 1911, writer Richard Barry claimed that “the printed word is never so ardent with an impressionable mind as the acted word.” Barry insisted that film viewing had had disastrous consequences for some adolescents. He suggested that one sixteen-year-old girl had committed suicide after watching a film in which a girl putting her head in a gas oven had been rescued by her lover; that two boys, after seeing *Jesse James at Bay*, had shot a dog, wounded a young girl, and fired at pursuing police with .22 caliber rifles; and that a fourteen-year-old boy accused of stealing jewelry confessed he had developed the notion of being a burglar from a motion picture.⁸

³ Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 122-28, 139, 140, 150, 183, 218, 223, 252, 263, 303, 366, 374.

⁴ Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 6-7, 41-42.

⁵ Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 48.

⁶ Gunning, *op. cit.*

⁷ Cited in Roberta E. Pearson and William Urrichio, “‘The Formative and Impressionable Stage’: Discursive Constructions of the Nickelodeon’s Child Audience,” in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds., *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1999), 67.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Surveys of the movie-going habits and preferences of children in the Progressive Era and after were normally aimed at teenagers and closely followed an agenda based on harm: the idea that adolescents were being corrupted by the films they saw—that the *effects* of film-going were detrimental and encouraged criminal behavior while simultaneously undercutting sexual mores. Underpinning many of these early investigations into movie audiences, therefore, was a discourse emphasizing the need for control. If films really had the bad effects on individual adolescent spectators and society in general that many observers believed, then there was a strong case for the regulation of film content. Many surveys seemed to back up this argument: illustrations include sociological studies in Portland, Oregon, in 1915; Iowa City in 1916; Providence, Rhode Island in 1918; and Evansville, Indiana, in 1923. Also in 1923, the Russell Sage Foundation, National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, and Associated First National Exhibitors collaborated in an investigation of the viewing habits of 37,000 high school students in 76 cities.⁹ In 1926, Alice Miller Mitchell conducted a survey into the movie-going practices of 10,052 Chicago school children, most of them adolescents.¹⁰ Edgar Dale studied the attendance of children at movies in Ohio in 1928 and 1930, finding that almost a quarter of audiences in Columbus were made up of 14 to 20 year-olds.¹¹ This concern for the impact on young people of attendance at the movies reached a peak with the publication between 1933 and 1935 of a series of eleven studies into movie-going habits and tastes financed by the Payne Fund.¹² Henry James Forman provided a gloss to the first findings of these studies in *Our Movie-Made Children* (1933), in which he argued the case for greater movie censorship to protect youngsters from being led astray by the powerful influence of Hollywood.¹³

If early investigations into adolescent American movie audiences were dominated by an attempt to underscore the deleterious influence of films, a later tradition of audience research was dedicated quite simply to the notion of expanding the profits of Hollywood studios. Many people have traditionally assumed that the movie industry knew less about its consumers than any other major American industry. As one movie executive commented in 1954, summarizing the conventional wisdom: “we have usually worked in the past on the thesis that if we stand in the dark and throw a rock and hear a crash, we’ve hit the greenhouse. This is not an altogether dependable method. It means that if you don’t hear a

⁹ Garth Jowett, “Giving Them What They Want: Movie Research Before 1950,” in Bruce A. Austin, ed., *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law*, vol. 1 (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1985), 23-26; Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture 1915-1928* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 26-30.

¹⁰ Alice Miller Mitchell, *Children and Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929).

¹¹ Edgar Dale, *Children's Attendance at Motion Pictures* (New York: Macmillan, 1935); attendance statistics cited in Leo A. Handel, *Hollywood Looks at Its Audience: A Report of Film Audience Research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950), 109.

¹² See Garth Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie and Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹³ Henry James Forman, *Our Movie-Made Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

crash, you may no longer be in the movie business.”¹⁴ In reality, at least since the 1930s, the sales departments of the major studios were distinguishing between a range of differing “taste publics.” Studio distributors and exhibitors developed a view of the movie audiences they sought to reach through a series of binary constructions—class/mass; sophisticated/unsophisticated; Broadway/Main Street—that would effectively become institutionalized in the zone-run-clearance system.¹⁵ There was also a long Hollywood tradition of gauging the reaction of viewers to specific films by arranging preview screenings.¹⁶

Finally, from the end of the 1930s, there were the supposedly reliable methods of market research into audiences pioneered by Dr. George Gallup and later Leo Handel. Starting off as a psychologist, Gallup launched market research in the 1930s on the basis of the assumption that human responses could be categorized and measured by objective scientific tests. In 1936 he extended his surveying techniques into politics and, from 1939 on, into the sphere of movie audiences. His work clearly had an impact on the studios he worked for. In 1941, indeed, Gallup was the first to point out that American audiences divided now not simply in terms of taste but also along age lines: teenagers now made up one-third of the entire national film audience. Gallup encouraged RKO, in particular, to make more films suitable for this youth audience and to groom a number of younger stars to appeal to them.¹⁷

This early research came to more general fruition in the decade of the 1950s. As Thomas Doherty showed in his 1999 study of *Teenagers and Teenpics*, the declining Hollywood studio system of the 1950s discovered the American teenager as a possible source of salvation. The juvenilization of film content that followed created what in recent years has become, in many ways, the operative reality of the motion picture industry. This juvenilization of American movies, Doherty argued, was most obviously revealed in the development of the 1950s “teenpic,” a film targeted at teenagers, frequently to the exclusion of their elders. Doherty identified several classic teenpic film types: rock 'n' roll

¹⁴ C. A. Palmer, “Commercial Practices in Audience Analysis,” *Journal of the University Film Association*, 6 (Spring 1954), 9.

¹⁵ See Richard Maltby, “Sticks, Hicks, and Flaps: Classical Hollywood's generic conception of its audiences,” in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds., *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 23-41.

¹⁶ David W. Griffith, for example, previewed his movie *The Birth of a Nation* (first known as *The Clansman*) at Riverside, California, on 1 and 2 January 1915, and continued to edit it on the basis of audience response before its openings in Los Angeles and Boston. Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's “The Birth of a Nation”: A History of “The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time”* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 103. There were also occasional surveys by proactive local cinemas—such as the Kinema Theater in Fresno, California, in 1924—that were cited in the trade press. See Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment*, 30.

¹⁷ Susan Ohmer, “The Science of Pleasure: George Gallup and Audience Research in Hollywood,” in Stokes and Maltby, eds., *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences*, 61-62, 64, 66-69. Also see Ohmer, *George Gallup in Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Leo A. Handel, *Hollywood Looks at Its Audiences: A report of film audience research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950).

pictures (including *Rock Around the Clock* and the later Elvis Presley movies), films pushing the idea of “dangerous youth” (the drag race in *Rebel Without a Cause*), horror films, and what became known as “clean teenpics” of the kind associated with Richard Boone.¹⁸

By the 1960s, the “founding teenagers” of the late 1950s were giving way to one of the great and most mythic generations of history: the baby-boomers. As the demographic size of the teenage population expanded, the term “teenage culture” was replaced by the more expansive “youth culture.” Youth, however, now became a concept not a chronology. It went beyond the traditional periods of adolescence, as defined by Hall, and teenager, as foregrounded in the 1940s and 50s. In the 1960s, a movie industry that was simultaneously having it very tough—in terms of shrinking audiences, higher production costs, and the downfall of the old studio system—was also rocked by a series of social and cultural shocks: the pill, the civil rights movement, the Beatles, drugs, and Vietnam. It responded by endeavoring to address the new youthful baby-boomer audience. Some of its efforts failed. But the remainder of this article will analyze two supposedly successful attempts to “sell” alienated youth to a youthful audience: *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, both released in 1967. It will suggest that both films reflected the collapse of Hollywood’s system of self-regulation more than they did the appeal to a particular age group and that marketing the films to young people raised more questions than it answered.

Both films started very uncertainly. *Bonnie and Clyde* was first shown at the Montreal Film Festival in early August 1967 and went on general release a few days later. It was greeted by such a storm of vitriol from a number of critics that Warner Brothers withdrew it from circulation. One of the fiercest critics was Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times*, who called it “a cheap piece of bald-faced slapstick comedy that treats the hideous depredations of that sleazy, moronic pair [the real Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker] as though they were as full of fun and frolic as the jazz-age cut-ups in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.” Crowther was especially angered by the “blending of farce with brutal killings,” which he saw as “pointless as it is lacking in taste.”¹⁹ It was only when critic Pauline Kael hailed the film as “contemporary in feeling” and introducing “into the almost frighteningly public world of movies things that people have been feeling and saying and writing about,”²⁰ and other critics such as Richard Schickel and Joseph Morgenstern changed their minds and recanted

¹⁸ See Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), *passim*.

¹⁹ Bosley Crowther, “*Bonnie and Clyde* Arrives,” *The New York Times*, 14 August 1967, reprinted in Lester D. Friedman, ed., *Arthur Penn’s “Bonnie and Clyde”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 77-78. Frank Eugene Beaver suggested that Crowther rejected the violence in *Bonnie and Clyde* because it was colored by “the film’s romantic and glamorous depiction of the two gangsters.” Beaver, *Bosley Crowther: Social Critic of the Film 1940-1967* (New York: Arno, 1974), 161.

²⁰ Pauline Kael, “*Bonnie and Clyde*,” *The New Yorker*, 21 October 1967, reprinted in Friedman, ed., *Arthur Penn’s “Bonnie and Clyde*,” 178-79.

on their original denunciation of it, that *Bonnie and Clyde* was re-released and became a popular hit.²¹

The Graduate also reportedly did not do very well on its first release in December 1967, and only really began to take off when publicists for Embassy Pictures began to rebrand it as a “youth film.”²² In retrospect, perceiving *The Graduate* as any kind of youth film is not easy. Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) looks much older than 21. He is not especially a “sixties” person. He doesn't have long hair and doesn't apparently “do” drugs. He is seemingly a virgin when he first becomes involved with the experienced adulteress, Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft). He dresses like any upper-class Californian: he can go to the Taft Hotel and crash the Singlemans' party without any comment. There are no reverberations of the supposedly wider turmoil of the 1960s in Benjamin's life. No reference at all is made in the film to political assassinations, the civil rights movement, or the war in Vietnam. In the career options for Ben the film presents—from graduate study to “plastics”—no mention is made of the draft. There does not seem to be any activism or disruption on the campus where Elaine Robinson (Katherine Ross) is studying—this is, after all, 1967 rather than 1968—though there is a faint echo of the times when Benjamin's landlord at Berkeley (Norman Fell) asks if he is “one of these outside agitators.” At the one moment in the film when Benjamin might be able to connect with less conformist young people—the group of casually-dressed youngsters listening to rock music at the drive-in—he closes the top of his convertible, shutting out his sixties contemporaries in order to leave himself and Elaine in their own private and obsessive cocoon.

As the pressbook for the film makes clear, the film was “sold” in a variety of fairly conventional ways. Hollywood gossip (“Dustin Hoffman Nearly Didn't Get the Part”), auteurism (“Director Mike Nichols Reaches the Heights of Achievement in only Four Years”), and boosts for Katherine Ross (described as a “sensitive beauty and great talent”) were at the core of the campaign. It was suggested that the film be promoted as “funny” and “entertaining” rather than addressing only youth. The one real play with the idea of youthful alienation came with the poster of Benjamin peering at Mrs. Robinson's outstretched leg.²³ But even this was weakened in the pressbook by the suggestion that the poster be appropriated and adjusted by commercial advertisers. The pressbook proposed window displays of the poster with the words “He's a little worried about his future” followed by “But *your* future is assured when you invest in,” with the inserted name of the appropriate bank, savings association, secretarial college, or employment bureau.

Traditional methods of “selling” pictures were also used to advertise *Bonnie and*

²¹ For Schickel's change of mind, see Richard Schickel, *Second Sight: Notes on Some Movies 1965-1970* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 140-44; for Morgenstern's, see Richard Schickel and John Simon, eds., *Film 67/68: An Anthology by the National Society of Film Critics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 25-29.

²² Douglas Brode, *The Films of Dustin Hoffman* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1983), 64.

²³ The leg itself famously belonged not to Anne Bancroft, who played Mrs. Robinson in the movie, but to Linda Grey, who would later become famous in the television series *Dallas* (1978-91, 2012-).

Clyde, which added crime and violence to *The Graduate*'s exploration of sexual themes. In a sense, *Bonnie and Clyde* lived up to the demands of the Production Code of 1930. The crimes committed by the Barrow gang are punished: Buck Barrow (Gene Hackman) is killed, his wife Blanche (Estelle Parsons) blinded, and Bonnie (Faye Dunaway) and Clyde (Warren Beatty) themselves are eviscerated in a hail of bullets. On the other hand, crime itself is made to seem cool, even rather sexy. As a much-quoted line on the advertising poster for the film had it: "They're young ... They're in love ... They kill people." In the unusual changes of mood that angered Bosley Crowther, the film switches from light-hearted capering as the gang outrun the law to the jangly music of Earl Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys or kidnap Gene Wilder's undertaker and his age-challenged girlfriend, Velma (Evans Evans) to scenes of sudden violence and brutality. Bonnie and Clyde themselves are given enough of a "Robin Hood" quality to make them seem popular heroes and the older generation in the film—Frank Hamer (Denver Pyle) and Ivan Moss (Dub Taylor)—enough deviousness and lack of scruple to make them stand-ins for both parents and the sixties establishment. The film echoes in one sequence the cultural wars of the sixties: when Ivan Moss meets Bonnie and Clyde for the first time, he ignores the fact that his son C. W. (Michael J. Pollard) has brought two notorious criminals to his house in order to criticize him because of the tattoo on his chest. The police in *Bonnie and Clyde* are either featureless card-board cut-outs blown away by the gang or the sinister Frank Hamer.²⁴ Small wonder that, at the end of the Hollywood première of the film, a member of the audience got to his feet at the end and shouted "Fucking cops!"²⁵

Bonnie and Clyde clearly departed from the insistence of the Production Code of 1930 that "brutal killings are not to be represented in detail."²⁶ Some commentators have seen the film as representing the more violent society America had become in the 1960s as crime rates soared and television brought the Vietnam War into the nation's living rooms.²⁷ I am not convinced. Watching the film last year with my students, it seemed to me that while there is seemingly a lot of blood around and violence does at times erupt with savage suddenness, much of the impact of the film has more to do with the fact that it is in color

²⁴ Angus M. Lauchlan argues that the portrayal of Hamer as an unscrupulous and deceitful policeman (*vide* how he wheedles information out of the blind Blanche Barrow by pretending sympathy) both expresses and reflects the declining reputation of the Texas Rangers as law-enforcement officers. Lauchlan, "Constructing White Texan Maleness: from the Texas Centennial of 1936 to the Aftermath of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963," Ph.D. diss., University of London, 2005, *passim*.

²⁵ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, quoted in Steven Alan Carr, "From 'Fucking Cops!' to 'Fucking Media,'" in Friedman, ed., *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 71.

²⁶ Gerald Mast, *Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 328.

²⁷ See Robert A. Rosenstone, "Bonnie and Clyde: 'Violence of a Most Grisly Sort,'" in Rosenstone, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 129-32; Carr, "From 'Fucking Cops!' to 'Fucking Media,'" 74-75; Stephen Prince, "The Hemorrhaging of American Cinema: *Bonnie and Clyde*'s Legacy of Cinematic Violence," in Friedman, ed., *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 127-30.

than it has with the difference between *Bonnie and Clyde* and previous black-and-white screen representations of violence. Until the final balletic shooting, with its echo of the assassination of JFK, Bonnie and Clyde seem like cartoon characters who have survived debilitating, life-threatening wounds only to bounce back in complete good health a couple of scenes later.

The year in which *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* were released was a curiously transitional moment in American film history. One regime of Hollywood self-regulation (the Production Code) had clearly lapsed, but the rating system that would replace it did not come into effect until 1968. In 1967, no one in the movie industry knew precisely where the boundaries were any more. This was as true in terms of sex as it was with regard to violence. Mainstream American filmmakers challenged the Hays Code by signifying female nudity, but without actually taking too many risks. As cinematographer Robert Surtees later wrote of *The Graduate*:

Director [Mike] Nichols had me photograph Anne Bancroft in a close-up, a simple head and shoulders shot. She stepped out of the camera and an artist's model took her place. Nichols then had me make very close inserts of the model's bare skin (her back, the fleshy part of her thigh). When in the editing these inserts were intermingled as "subliminal flashes" with the big close-up of Bancroft, and with cuts back-&-forth to [Dustin] Hoffman's wide-eyed reactions, the audience believed it had seen a naked woman.²⁸

Arthur Penn was equally careful in his photographing of Faye Dunaway during the opening sequence of the film. After the film was finished but before its release, Warren Beatty thought it would be a good idea to show it to Father Sullivan of the Catholic Legion of Decency. The Legion, by this point, was an almost mythical body that had lost nearly all its power. But the showing of the film did not get very far. Father Sullivan, who clearly didn't get out a lot, became fixated on the sequence in which Bonnie runs downstairs from her bedroom. Sullivan swore that Dunaway was wearing no panties when she came down the stairs—when in fact she was. And, as Warren Beatty remembered it,

He kept running the film back and forth saying, "Oh, no. That's her breast!" And we'd say, "No, Father, it's just her dress, it's silk!" And he'd say, "No, no, I see her breast! Wait, I think I see a nipple!" We'd say, "No, no, that's just a button."²⁹

The fact that Father Sullivan focused on discrete body parts was completely in the tradition of the Hays Code, which prescribed those parts that could not be shown. In reality, the filmmakers—by repeated initial shots of Dunaway's bare back and shoulders—almost certainly helped convince many other moviegoers than Father Sullivan that they were seeing much more than was really the case.

²⁸ Robert L. Surtees, "The Graduate's Photography," *Films in Review*, vol. 9, no. 2 (February 1968), 91.

²⁹ Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-drugs-and Rock 'n' Roll Generation Changed Hollywood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 35.

The conservatism of the filmmakers with regard to issues of sex also demonstrated itself in changes made to the characterization and storyline. The original script by David Newman and Robert Benton for *Bonnie and Clyde* had Clyde Barrow as bi-sexual and he, Bonnie, and another male gang member taking part in a *ménage à trois*. "We liked that idea," Newman and Benton later recalled, "it seemed just bizarre and somehow brave enough to fit right in with our notion of the Barrow gang's avant-garde style." But Warren Beatty, the film's producer/star, flatly refused to play a homosexual. He was supported in this by director Arthur Penn, who argued that "these characters are out there far enough. If you want the audience to identify with them, you're going to lose that immediately if you say this guy is homosexual."³⁰ Working three years before the riot at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York, which heralded the birth of the modern gay rights movement, the filmmakers were convinced that references to homosexuality and troilism would sharply diminish their appeal to contemporary audiences (an argument that was finally accepted by Newman and Benton themselves).³¹

There were elements of both *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde* that did reflect, for many, the experience of being young in the 1960s. In the case of *The Graduate*, this had mainly to do with the angst experienced by Benjamin, the pampered child of an upper middle-class California family who rejects the life (if not the lifestyle) of his parents and has little enthusiasm for surrendering himself to the economic grind of corporate America. Through Benjamin, the film also critiques two bedrock American institutions: the family and, in its final sequences, the Catholic Church. *Bonnie and Clyde*, from its celebration of modern, Warhol-esque fleeting celebrity (the poetry and photographs Bonnie sends to newspapers) to what Nancy F. Cott sees as "her 1960s eye makeup, making no concessions to period style," can be seen to reflect the values and appearances of the sixties.³² The final sequence of the film, remarks Matthew Bernstein, "as the couple drive to Ivan Moss's home from town, sharing an apple, with Clyde ... wearing John Lennon-style sunglasses with one lens missing and Bonnie ... tossing her hair with a huge smile, makes them 1960s flower children in 1930s garb."³³

³⁰ David Newman and Robert Benton, "Lightning in a Bottle," in Sandra Wake and Nicola Hayden, ed., *The Bonnie and Clyde Book* (London: Lorimer, 1972), 27; Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, 32.

³¹ "It was a time," David Newman later recalled, "when people commonly called gays 'perverts' or worse and conventional thinking had homosexuality as a sickness ... we risked alienating the audience from what we so badly wanted—that the audience would love and identify with Clyde and Bonnie from the outset, so that by the time the two start doing 'violent things,' it is too late for the audience to back away from their identification with the desperadoes." Newman, "What's It Really All About?: Pictures at an Execution," in Friedman, *Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde,"* 36-37. On the final acceptance of the changes by the original scriptwriters, see Newman and Benton, "Lightning in a Bottle," 28.

³² Nancy F. Cott, "Bonnie and Clyde," in Mark C. Carnes, Ted Mico, John Miller-Monzon, and David Rubel, eds., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (London: Cassell, 1996), 220.

³³ Matthew Bernstein, "Perfecting the New Gangster: Writing *Bonnie and Clyde*," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 4 (2000), 19.

At the same time, however, it is clear that many writers about the film were constructing an imaginary view of how and why young people responded as they did to *Bonnie and Clyde*. Both the film's scriptwriters and its earliest critics were involved in promoting what Steven Alan Carr term's "this new fictive youth audience," both groups adopting a highly selective and generalized view of sixties youth and its values.³⁴ In 1964, screenwriters Newman and Benton wrote that the real Bonnie and Clyde, if they had been around in the sixties, "would be hip. Their values have become assimilated in much of our culture—not robbing banks and killing people, of course, but their style, their sexuality, their bravado, their delicacy, their cultivated arrogance, their narcissistic insecurity, their curious ambition have relevance to the way we live now."³⁵ Bosley Crowther, whose long career as the principal *New York Times* film critic was effectively ended by his opposition to the film, would later (1978) write that the film was calculated to "gratify the preconceptions and illusions of young people who had come of age with the Beatles and Bob Dylan, the philosophy of doing your own thing and the notion that defying the Establishment was beautiful and brave."³⁶ Richard Schickel would confess, in a similar way to Crowther, that he and many other critics had not at first understood the ways in which *Bonnie and Clyde* had "plugged into youth's new ... image of itself as a band of outsiders entitled to embrace (or at least applaud) even illegal methods in attacking the corrupt, corrupting social order ruled by old men and institutions."³⁷

Later commentators corroborated and expanded on such comments. There was a general feeling that the two films somehow spoke to the needs and priorities of disenfranchised young people. *Bonnie and Clyde*, Peter Biskind wrote,

legitimized violence against the establishment, the same violence that seethed in the hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of frustrated opponents of the Vietnam War ... *Bonnie and Clyde* was a movement movie; like *The Graduate*, young audiences recognized that it was "theirs."³⁸

"Unable to find anything worthy of emulation in a society devoid of social purposes," wrote John Baxter, "the young audiences saw Penn's couple as saints for a disenfranchised age."³⁹ To Ethan Mordden, *The Graduate*

was the climactic generation-war film of the 1960s, the one in which the parents are totally corrupt and the kids spotless. Hoffman's folks ... are nagging jerks; [Katherine] Ross's father ... is a worthless nerd and her mother ... a cold-blooded

³⁴ Carr, "From 'Fucking Cops!' to 'Fucking Media,'" 94.

³⁵ Newman and Benton, "The New Sentimentality," *Esquire*, 62 (July 1964), here as quoted in Bernstein, "Perfecting the New Gangster," 19.

³⁶ Bosley Crowther, *Reruns: Fifty Memorable Films* (New York: Putnam, 1978), 203-204.

³⁷ Schickel, *Second Sight*, quoted in Carr, "From 'Fucking Cops!' to 'Fucking Media,'" 94.

³⁸ Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, 49; cf. Lester Friedman, *Bonnie and Clyde* (London: BFI, 2000), 30.

³⁹ Cited in Lawrence L. Murray, "Hollywood, Nihilism, and the Youth Culture of the Sixties: *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)," in John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson, eds., *American History/American Film: Interpreting the American Image* (New York: Ungar/Continuum, 1988), 249.

adulteress who deliberately punishes her lover Hoffman by marrying Ross off to a worthless nerd-in-the-making.⁴⁰

The idea that the 1960s were somehow a watershed in American cinema during which the concerns and priorities of youth came to be addressed in landmark films such as *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde* is in many ways deceptive. As Leonard Quart and Albert Auster have pointed out, tales of youthful outsiders—including Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937) and Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night* (1949)—had been captured on film long before the 1960s.⁴¹ Moreover, in the sixties, Hollywood as an institution generally proved almost entirely clueless in its attempts to appeal to youthful, baby-boomer audiences. The films that consciously endeavored to be a hit with young people on the whole failed. Yet, as Steven Carr notes, the films “that the industry expected to flop, like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* ... turned out to be wildly popular with young audiences.”⁴²

In the sixty-three years from the publication of G. Stanley Hall's book on adolescence to the release of *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, youth moved from being an element in cinema audiences to the dominant part of such audiences. The enthusiasm of youth audiences for these two films in 1967, indeed, induced some contemporary observers to see them as heralding an end to the long decline in American moviegoing from its peak in 1946. Ultimately, it proved nothing of the kind. It would not be until the rise of the multiplex in the eighties that the size of the cinemagoing audience started to grow again. And, by that time, the introduction of the VCR meant that most people of any age's engagement with film would no longer be primarily in movie theaters.

Hollywood did not discover youth as a target audience in 1967. As suggested earlier, that discovery can be traced back to the 1940s and probably even earlier. Looking at the publicity—and especially the pressbooks—for *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate*, I must confess to having expected to find evidence for a skilful targeting of a youth audience. In reality, there was almost no such evidence. Most publicity for the films was of a fairly conventional type, with a few nods in the direction of younger moviegoers. Instead, I found myself wondering whether the appeal of the two films had more to do with the edgy uncertainties of 1967 in American cinema—the notion that one era of industry self-regulation designed to protect young people from the supposedly evil effects of motion pictures had come to an end while nothing had yet replaced it. *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* were very much products of this transitional era. They seemed to promise far more than they eventually delivered.⁴³ Perhaps that makes them representative of the sixties as a whole.

⁴⁰ Ethan Mordden, *Medium Cool: The Movies of the 1960s* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 180.

⁴¹ Leonard Quart and Albert Auster, *American Film and Society Since 1945* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), 82.

⁴² Carr, “From ‘Fucking Cops!’ to ‘Fucking Media,’” 94.

⁴³ Looking back eleven years after the release of *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, Andrew Sarris sadly judged that “American cinema has tended to become more vulgarly regressive throughout the seventies. ...

movies in 1978 tend to be less realistic and less critical than they were in 1968." Sarris, "After *The Graduate*," *American Film*, vol. 3, no. 9 (July-August 1978), 36.