

# Bonnie Parker: And the Enslavement of a Modern Woman

Recent books on the infamous American outlaw duo, Bonnie Parker and Clyde

were a loving, back-against-the-wall, couple. Authors have depicted the duo as a great team who loved and supported each other until their deaths. What they do not show is that Bonnie was quite different from Clyde, to the extent that she was as much a victim of Barrow's anger as the shop-owners and lawmen that Clyde murdered.<sup>1</sup>

Historians have focused to a great extent on actual slavery and human trafficking globally, but they have missed the kind of psychological slavery that often connects brutal men with victimized women. In this perspective of Bonnie and Clyde, I will argue that Bonnie Parker became a "de-facto slave"<sup>2</sup> of Clyde, by the means of her psychological vulnerability, and the blackmailing and manipulation practiced by Clyde. I will argue that much of the recent literature is misleading, because instead of the apparent team they assume, there was in fact, a striking, asymmetrical relation between the famous outlaw duo.

In order to understand the psychological servitude that tied Bonnie to Clyde, we must first look at the growth of factors in the modern female mindset that make such asymmetry possible. Women and others born to subservience can slip into a psychological slavery that is just as intense, and harmful as actual slavery. This psychological slavery is based on strongly inbred myths, or illusions, and one of the first

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*Down Together: The True, Untold Story of Bonnie and Clyde*  
*My Life With Bonnie And Clyde*

*Bonnie and Clyde: A Twenty-First-Century Update*

Ralph Fults

*Trippler's Guide to Gangster Sites in Middle America  
and Times of Bonnie & Clyde*  
*Bonnie and Clyde*

*Running With Bonnie and Clyde: The Ten Fast Years of*

*Traveling History with Bonnie and Clyde: A Road*

*The Lives*

*The Family Life of*

of these deep-seated beliefs that is socialized into many girls at a young age is the Myth of the All-Providing Father. The Parker family lived in Rowena, Texas, where Bonnie's father, Henry, was a bricklayer. They lived quite comfortably off of his plentiful salary during the booming 1920s when small towns like Rowena were being transformed by automobiles, and the emergence of sizable middle class subdivisions. In the very impressionable, conscious and memorable period in Parker's life from age four to eight,

expected her children to sit with good posture, and for her girls to walk as ladies. She took her children to church every Sunday because she said, "That is what the best people did." This parade quickly became a charade in the mind of the adolescent Parker. The young girl learned not only what a misfortune it was to not have a man around the house, but how a merely feminist pretense was a sham. In other words, a great refutation of modern feminism and all it represents occurs in the minds of many children of female-headed households. This is not to put the blame on Emma Parker, or on single women, but merely to note that their options are severely limited. As it happened, the future "sink to his feet" tendency of her daughter was enhanced by the fact that her mother lived a lie.

dreamed of becoming a writer or an actress and hoped to be famous. And yet as with addicts, long-term goals remained empty unless mixed with short-term fixes. Biographers have noted that Parker's inferiority syndrome led to many bouts of crying throughout her life.<sup>5</sup> A quick cure for her biting anxieties and obsessions always seemed the first step toward obtaining the long-range scenario. The young woman, overtaken by an inferiority obsession, could not see that the quick cure would disable the long term goal. R

critical mother initially for long stretches. Parker's male illusion was at this point inscribed on her heart, and it would henceforth be partially hidden at times, but never effaced. Later in her poem *Street Girl*, Parker wrote of "Santa Claus Men," who would provide a woman with glamour, money, and opportunity. In her poem, *Suicide Sal*, Bonnie described how the young woman protagonist found "Jack" to be "like a god to me."<sup>7</sup>

That this myth could live independently of the reality was a testament to how strong a myth it was. In actuality, the marriage with Roy, like many teenage romances kindled by desperation, proved a disaster. Parker missed her family and was distraught at the idea of not seeing her one remaining parent for long periods of time. Soon enough,

as a waitress in West Dallas, but with the economy on the decline, she didn't hold the job long. While looking for work, Parker agreed to stay at a friend's house who had recently broken her arm, to help around the house. Parker was coming apart inside with desperation. She was the wrong sex, the wrong height, a malfunctioning female; a father-deprived little fairy whose abilities were redundant to a society that lacked jobs. It was that night that Bonnie met Clyde.

To comprehend the idea of Bonnie becoming a hostage to a criminal, we must now speculate on the up-bringing of the subjugator. Clyde Barrow is a good poster child for the hyperactive young male child of modern dysfunctional families, full of unspent rage, needing in today's context to be drugged by Ritalin just to get him through the eighth grade. Clyde was the sixth out of eight children for Henry and Cummie Barrow. One symptom of modern times, the breakup of the family, also affected the Barrows, but in this case, Henry, the father, seemed ineffective, and it was the son who schemed for his independence. Henry Barrow could neither read nor write. The Barrows were tenant farmers in Telico, Texas who were not making enough money to even put food on the table. Seething with indignation, Clyde and his older siblings were often sent to live with and beg from other relatives. When Clyde was about 12 years old, the family moved to west Dallas. They began their urban life together living under the Oak Street viaduct. West Dallas was the poor side of town, which consisted mainly of families who were

trying to make ends meet and a numerous amount of miscreant children. Clyde was ambitious, angry, and ill-educated.<sup>9</sup>

Famous American slave-holders from before the Civil War era like Jefferson Davis, Robert Rhett, William Yancey, and James Hammond were explosive men, with vitriolic tempers. They were highly ambitious; generally lacking in liberal education and willing to cut slack with the means should they hinder the ends. Barrow grew up to be such a man. He was enticing, with thick brown hair parted on the left side, and a smile that could be turned on at will, and then shut off with an impulsiveness known to gamblers, and actors. The aspiring slave master, Clyde spent his time in front of mirror, modeling new clothes, and barking out orders, dreaming himself into the acquisition of a sort of “hypnotic magnetism.” As the young Hitler understood that charisma could enslave a nation, so the young Barrow instinctively developed a kind of inner light and flashiness that could make him the king of his world.

Clyde, by this time, was working his way up as the leader of a criminal band. A group formed around his brother Buck, and petty criminal, Sidney Moore, began to find Clyde to be an authority on everything from cars to guns, girls, and holdups. In an earlier time, when a man’s dream was to inherit his father’s farm, the need to emerge at



more than ready to shackle a desperate 90-pound woman, and take her outside the zone of the law, so that his dominance could be complete. Even fellow criminals at this point were awed by Barrow's "irascible, volcanic temper," this ability to turn quickly with wild abandon on another. This was the quality that Southern men like the Texas senator, Louis Wigfall, cultivated before the Civil War, to offer the satisfaction of a duel at a moment's notice, to let everyone know that retribution for any misdeed could come quick and decisively.

The scene was now set for the two to meet, and for Clyde to lasso Bonnie into a life as h

thrown in jail and he called on Parker to visit him. Living in a world of illusions and lies, Parker did the unthinkable, and followed the bidding of a dangerous criminal.

When Bonnie came to visit Clyde, he asked her to do him a favor. One of Clyde's cellmates lived nearby, and he asked Bonnie to break into his house, steal a pistol, and smuggle it into the cell for them. Clyde sweet-talked Bonnie, and in this zero hour of animal male charisma, and female fantasy, the deed was done. She would do anything for Clyde, for her whole life had come down to the need for male-rescue. So she went through with the plan and helped Clyde and his cellmates escape.

who had been framed. One officer even gave her a shirt of his to wear instead of the prison garment, as the latter seemed so completely absurd on the body of the dejected girl. How had she, they wondered, become the accomplice of rage-filled Clyde Barrow? She did not plan robberies. She had never used a gun, and would only pose with one when asked by Clyde, which is another illustration of the life of slavery Bonnie was living. She was in so many respects just one very unfortunate, impoverished woman. But now she was chained to a violent man with a violent temper whose mode of sustenance involved—not running off to Alaska for their sake, but robbing small stores, gas stations, and banks while killing 13 people.

Life on the road for Bonnie was filled with disappointments, crushed dreams, and a gunshot away from death. The law was always on their tails, and a few times it was a miracle they escaped. If she seemed to be in love with Clyde, that point was moot. Clyde who gave his guns female names, may well have loved them, perhaps even sexually more than Parker. According to a gas station attendant who was kidnapped by the pair, Barrow and Parker did not have intimate, loving relations. It was also rumored that Clyde was gay, which would have crushed Bonnie's need for a man's touch. It was just that Clyde was her only source of sustenance and life. Grunts, misleading innuendo, long rides to nowhere, and nights where a naked woman might just as well encounter her friend's loaded pistol under a pillow rather than his hand ensued. Roy's ring remained on her hand, the lone holdout of a more auspicious time. Parker's mother Emma, for one, would never recognize that a love affair between her daughter and Clyde ever existed. And she would have known because Bonnie visited her mother while an outlaw. Later Emma, refused to have the two buried together.

While on the road with Clyde, Bonnie wanted a way to escape. Yet, she was too afraid to what would happen if she were to leave Clyde. Would he find and gun her down for escaping his “chains” that kept her bound? In her poem, *Suicide Sal*, confiscated by police after a raid, Bonnie wrote that “rods were rulers.” “Rod” can be slang for “pistol”, which would summarize the gun-enchanted Clyde in any case, but it can also be an off-color allusion to males. She also wrote: “You’ve heard of a woman’s glory being spent on a downright cur.” What was she, in a sense, but a young woman bound to a violent, senseless, man who acted the part of an enraged, ill-bred dog? Could she now go back home to her loving mother; start a new life, one of which she could live her dreams instead of someone else’s? Obviously not. The “rod,” the “cur,” had the authority. Clyde was an intimidating factor that kept her by his side. With a violent temper and trigger-happy finger, there is no doubt that she could have endured verbal and perhaps physical abuse. He kept her chained up by promises that would come up empty, the idea of a man to love.

On May 23, 1934, Bonnie and Clyde were heading to an accomplice’s house when they were caught in a trap set up by law enforcement. They were ambushed and given no chance of surrender. More than 130 rounds were shot into their car, and it was the end for Bonnie and Clyde. Each body was hit around 50 times, but Bonnie did not die instantly. Reports from the lawmen that gunned them down reported that you could hear her long horrified screams as the bullets tore into the car. And why such screaming? Why not a stoic death, or a Warren Beatty-Faye Dunaway pouring out of tender, last-minute eye-to-eye affinity? Were such screams for the police’s sake? Or were such



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