



# American Legends: The Life of Robert Mitchum

*Charles River Editors*

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"I never take any notice of reviews - unless a critic has thought up some new way of describing me. That old one about my lizard eyes and anteater nose and the way I sleep my way through pictures is so hackneyed now." – Robert Mitchum

A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history's most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors' American Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of America's most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

If one assembled a list of the most iconic actors of the film noir genre, Robert Mitchum would surely rank at the top of the list. With his deadpan façade and slow, monotone verbal delivery, Mitchum encapsulated the disillusioned hero of the postwar crime genre. In many of his most famous movies from the postwar era, including *Out of the Past* (1947) and *Angel Face* (1952), Mitchum plays anti-heroes who are victims of circumstance, but even as he is placed in situations beyond his control, he maintains a cool, if dispassionate countenance. Mitchum was, in short, neither a hero nor a villain but someone who seemed to defy the often-simplistic distinctions between protagonist and antagonist, hero and villain.

Even so, for someone who put on such a cool façade, Mitchum certainly experienced a great deal of hardship. From the death of his father, James, to his rough adolescence—much of which was spent traveling on railcars during the throes of the Great Depression—Robert Mitchum lived the part of the hard-luck antiheroes he portrayed onscreen. Up until his adult life, there was little indication that he would grow up to become anything more than a working-class factory worker, let alone a world-famous movie star. It is telling that Mitchum remained within the confines of the gritty noir and western genres; to imagine him acting in a romantic comedy would be antithetical to the reputation that he built. Mitchum was, to be sure, one of the premier A-list stars of the 1940s and 1950s, but he was a leading man in the hypermasculine mold of Humphrey Bogart rather than the more diverse skill set of Henry Fonda or Jimmy Stewart. In any event, one of the great mysteries of Robert Mitchum's career is that for all the poor luck that his characters experienced, he still was able to affect a debonair sensibility that made him identifiable—a man to which viewers were irresistibly attracted, even if his characters did not necessarily warrant such a response.

This biography looks at the process that led from Robert Mitchum rising from impoverished Depression-era youth to leading Hollywood celebrity. Mitchum's harsh childhood, including the premature death of his father and his dangerous life on the road, are discussed, as well as the process that saw him ascend through the acting industry. Important themes from Mitchum's films are discussed (including postwar masculinity and the role of the antihero), as is the cultural climate in which he worked, which was to a large degree responsible for facilitating his rise to fame.

*American Legends: The Life of Robert Mitchum* looks at the life and career of one of America's most famous film noir actors. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Robert Mitchum like never before, in no time at all.

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