



# American Legends: The Life of Mae West

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures.

\*Includes Mae's most famous, clever and controversial quotes.

\*Includes quotes from Mae's autobiography about her life and career.

\*Includes a bibliography for further reading.

“Between two evils, I generally like to pick the one I never tried before.” – Mae West

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.

Mae West will always be remembered as one of Hollywood's biggest icons, and the American Film Institute named her the 15th greatest actress of the 20th century in its Top 100 list, but she also transcended the entertainment industry and became a critical part of Americana itself. Over the course of 7 decades, Mae redefined the boundaries of sexuality in ways that made more conservative Americans of the early 20th century uncomfortable, and for good measure she did so boldly and in people's faces. Full of witty rejoinders and one-liners that both flaunted and celebrated her sexuality, she eventually managed to help usher in a more open era, even as the standards of the time found her so controversial that she was often subjected to censorship (which she once quipped “made a fortune” for her). Mae and some of her movies have been widely credited with spurring the implementation of the notorious Hays Code, which censored lewd and obscene material in Hollywood movies for several years, but she remained defiant. Even near the end of her life and career, when cast in a role where she is romantically pursued by a British man, her elderly character wisecracks that she hopes to be able to say what Paul Revere did: “The British are coming.”

Although Mae West is mostly remembered for being one of the 20th century's first and most important sex symbols, she was a versatile entertainer who made it in different venues across the country and across the years. Like many young actresses at the time, Mae started in vaudeville and stage in New York before heading west to Hollywood. In fact, by the time she starred in movies, she was nearing the age of 40, well after most star actresses had seen their careers peaked. Nonetheless, Mae continued to portray vixens that drove men nuts on screen for decades, all while being a comedienne and even writing her own plays and materials. Even after her film career was over, she returned to the stage and appeared on television shows. By the time Mae West was nearing the end of her life, she was a ubiquitous pop culture presence. American servicemen made bawdy references to her when parachutes split in two, certainly the kind of comparisons she appreciated, and even The Beatles felt compelled to convince Mae West to let them use her likeness on the album cover of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. True to form, Mae initially objected to being a member of a “Lonely Hearts Club”. But just as importantly, Mae's self-confidence and sense of independence helped pave new paths for actresses who followed her.

American Legends: The Life of Mae West examines the life and career of one of Hollywood's biggest sex icons. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Mae West like never before, in no time at all.

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