



# American Legends: The Life of Tony Curtis

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures \*Includes Curtis' quotes about his own life and career \*Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading \*Includes a table of contents “If you know how to live in Vegas you can have the best time.” – Tony Curtis 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. At the height of Hollywood’s “golden age” of the 1940s through the early ‘60s, many of the industry’s brightest stars could boast of unique stories describing how they were discovered. Their distinctiveness as on-screen personalities was an important part of that stardom, but one unlikely actor, a mismatch of contrasts, dialects, looks, and personal behavior, was to become an icon of the age, revered and disdained, but in the end, fondly remembered by the movie industry and fan base. Tony Curtis was, in the beginning, considered by most of his colleagues as a hack actor, but in time, one who took it upon himself to develop into a true screen artist. At his height as a matinee idol, Curtis was blessed with “piercing blue eyes and good looks,” a physicality described by the New York Times as “classically handsome.” He was to set a new criteria in place for male beauty in his era, a “feminized” but rugged heroism, able to portray grisly scenes with a “pretty boy” appearance, then immediately turn “cute” and excel in light comedy. Off-screen, Curtis was one of Hollywood’s most prodigious womanizers, with a “predatory sexual magnetism” that was both alluring and feared, a quality that translated directly onto the screen, where Curtis presented a mix of himself as “part rogue and part earnest, sensitive hunk.” His many liaisons, numbering over a thousand, included the yet undiscovered Marilyn Monroe in her teen years, Natalie Wood, and Janet Leigh of Psycho fame. In addition to his work as an actor, Curtis became a successful painter, and held his time spent creating canvasses in higher esteem than any of his cinematic performances. The New York Museum of Modern Art has his work in its collections, and many have sold at considerable prices. He was also an accomplished amateur flautist and an occasional novelist, maintaining a professionally consistent work ethic, despite an adult life filled with alcohol and drug use. In a career filled with quirky, romantic, and unsettling roles, Curtis took part in over one hundred films. Many were based on average scripts at best, but even for these, he is beloved in retrospect, and most admired for his work in *Some Like It Hot*, *Spartacus*, *The Defiant Ones*, and *Houdini*, among others. Such was Curtis’ charm that a generation of movie-goers, and even critics, looked the other way as he played everything from Shakespearean kings to Arab spin-offs, medieval knights, and Roman and Viking slaves to tremendous acclaim, all with a Bronx accent and a particularly American swagger. *American Legends: The Life of Tony Curtis* examines the life and career of America’s most famous actors. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Tony Curtis like never before, in no time at all.

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