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American Legends: The Life of Spencer Tracy

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*Includes pictures.
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“Know your lines and don't bump into the furniture.” – Spencer Tracy
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.
Of all the screen legends whose names remain synonymous with Hollywood, few took as long to become a star as Spencer Tracy, who is today recognized as one of the greatest actors ever but whose career did not truly take off until he was already in his mid-30s. After languishing with Fox for 5 years and over two dozen movies, one biographer had summed up his career to that point in time: “Tracy was scarcely a blip on the box office barometer in 1935, a critics' darling and little more."
However, after joining MGM in 1935, Tracy catapulted to fame with one of the most impressive runs in Hollywood history, winning Oscars for Best Actor in 1938 and 1939 after already being nominated in 1937. Over the next three decades, Tracy would appear in classics like Captains Courageous and Judgment at Nuremburg, appear in 9 films with Katharine Hepburn, and receive 9 Oscar nominations over a span of 32 years, including for his final film, Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner. Several contemporaries considered Tracy the greatest actor of his era, a sentiment summed up by actor Richard Widmark, who once said, "He's the greatest movie actor there ever was...I've learned more about acting from watching Tracy than in any other way."
Tracy’s career earned him an unbelievable number of accolades, and a place in the American Film Institute’s Top 10 actors of the 20th century, but it’s also an open question how much more he could have accomplished without a litany of health problems brought on by alcohol. Even as he went years at a time without drinking, the effects gradually wore him down physically, and by his early 60’s, he needed full-time care, provided mostly by his most famous co-star and lover, Katharine Hepburn. Ironically, his relationship with Hepburn has actually served to overshadow his own acting career among modern viewers, even as his acting abilities remain universally recognized.
American Legends: The Life of Spencer Tracy profiles the life, career, and legacy of the man deemed by the American Film Institute as one of Hollywood’s 10 greatest actors. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Spencer Tracy like you never have before, in no time at all.

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