



American Legends: The Life of Gene Tierney

Charles River Editors

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“I ask myself: Would I have been any worse off if I had stayed home or lived on a farm instead of shock treatments and medication?” – Gene Tierney

“I was fine when it came to cheering up others, not so fine with myself.” – Gene Tierney

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.

When people are asked to list the pros and cons of a star in Hollywood, there's a good chance that Gene Tierney lived all of the highs and lows they would come up with. In many ways, Tierney had the prototypical career of an actress who experienced the best that Hollywood had to offer and got caught up with some of its most notorious pitfalls.

With beauty queen looks, Tierney was almost immediately marked for success as an actress once she was discovered, and after just a year on Broadway, she was making her film debut around her 20th birthday. But once she seemed to be on the road to instant fame, her early career faltered, and all the while, she felt the stress and pressure to look her best, including adhering to a strict diet to maintain weight. She also became a heavy smoker in an attempt to lower her voice, which she complained made her sound too much like “an angry Minnie Mouse.”

Tierney was a major star in her 20s, was one of World War II's most notable pinups, and she was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress by the age of 25, but life off the screen continued to cause her problems. By the time she was in her 30s, Tierney was struggling with severe bouts of depression, which led to her being institutionalized and even receiving electroshock therapy. Tierney hated the shock therapy and complained that it led to memory loss, and she once bitterly remarked, “I existed in a world that never is - the prison of the mind.”

On top of that, she suffered at least one miscarriage and gave birth to a premature baby that had mental handicaps in part because Tierney had contracted rubella, possibly from a fan who came into close contact with her. Struggling to cope with it all, Tierney attempted suicide, and after being committed yet again, her acting career was almost over.

Tierney attempted a comeback of sorts in the 1960s, but after just a few projects, she was all but through with acting, making just one more appearance in a TV miniseries in 1980. In one final blow brought about in part due to her acting career, Tierney died of emphysema when she was 70, a disease caused by the smoking habit she had taken up in order to further herself in Hollywood.

American Legends: The Life of Red Skelton chronicles the life and career of one of America's most famous

actresses. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Gene Tierney like never before, in no time at all.

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