



American Legends: The Life of Shirley Temple

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures of Shirley Temple and important people, places, and scenes.

*Includes Temple's own quotes about her life and relationships.

*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

"I stopped believing in Santa Claus when I was six. Mother took me to see him in a department store and he asked for my autograph." – Shirley Temple

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.

Shirley Temple remains the most famous child star of all time, but even this designation fails to reflect the magnitude of her popularity during the era in which she worked. While it is true that she was not the first child actor to reach Hollywood fame, she was the first—and to this day, perhaps the only—star who rose to the very pinnacle of the Hollywood elite before she even turned 10 years of age. For this reason, it is no exaggeration to view Shirley as the progenitor for all of the child actors that succeeded her. Moreover, her cultural importance constitutes an even more important barometer through which to measure her overall significance. Not only was Shirley a film star, but she had a monumental impact on a generation of children who grew up during the Great Depression, with her plucky optimism representing an invaluable calming presence for an American public struggling both financially and emotionally. She was not only a young actress but also a brand name, someone who offered fathers and mothers hope for their children to achieve the same success as the famous child star.

For all of Shirley Temple's fame, it is no doubt surprising to many that her actual films received scant critical acclaim. Her films were never mentioned on critical "best of" lists, nor did they regularly appear on the list of nominees for the Academy Awards. In fact, even though most everyone has viewed at least one of her films, it is unlikely that most people could name many of her films. This is not mentioned to degrade her films but instead to identify the way in which the significance of the child star far outshined that of her films. It is worth considering, therefore, what the relationship was between Temple and her films, and how she was framed within the narratives. How exactly did Temple first reach Hollywood fame, and how did the many films she appeared in between 1934 and 1938 - the height of her career - build her fame to its lofty peak even as they were quickly forgotten?

Yet another stark difference in Temple's career was the way in which it declined as quickly as it rose. With most famous actresses, a relatively unremarkable childhood precedes an extraordinary film career, but with Temple, the opposite dynamic took place; she led a childhood whose fame has never been equaled, and it has overshadowed the rest of her adult life. Regardless, Shirley Temple remains a household name today, not only for the way in which her career shaped America during the Depression but for the path she blazed for other child stars.

American Legends: The Life of Shirley Temple profiles the life and career of Hollywood's most famous child star. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Shirley Temple like you never have before, in no time at all.

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