



# American Legends: The Life of Gene Kelly

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures.

\*Includes Kelly's quotes about his life and career.

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“Fred Astaire represented the aristocracy, I represented the proletariat.” – Gene Kelly

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 think of musicals, two of the first names that immediately spring to mind are Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire, two giants of one of Hollywood's most distinctive genres. Without question, both men played an instrumental role in popularizing and sustaining the musical from the 1930s through the 1950s, the final decades of Hollywood's Golden Age. Although they did collaborate on two occasions, in many ways Gene Kelly's rise to popularity in the 1940s amounted to a changing of the guard, because Astaire's career had begun to wane by the mid-1940s. For film historians and fans of the musical, however, even if they weren't contemporaries, Astaire and Kelly will forever be viewed as rivals, with each having left an indelible stamp on the genre that defined their careers. Regardless of which dancer viewers film, there is no denying the cultural significance of some of Kelly's most famous films, including *An American in Paris* (1949) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), movies that occupy a central position within the pantheon of Hollywood musicals.

While it is true that a comparison between Astaire and Kelly is indispensable to any study of Kelly's life, much can also be gained simply by focusing mostly on his life and career. What made Kelly unusual for actors of that era is that he did not actually arrive in Hollywood until he was nearly 30 years old, so his early life and work before film had a crucial influence on his star image. Furthermore, given that he came to prominence after Astaire, Kelly's career offers a valuable lens through which to chart the evolution of the musical genre, as well as a look at the prevailing standards of masculinity within Hollywood at the time. *American Legends: The Life of Gene Kelly* examines the life and career of one of Hollywood's most iconic dancers, tracing his rise to stardom and the forces within Hollywood and American popular culture that would ultimately lead to the end of his career. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Kelly like never before, in no time at all.

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