American actor James Dean had a short-lived but intense acting career that began in 1952 and ended tragically with his death in September 1955. After his death he became a cult figure (a legendary person), and fans have marveled for decades at his ability to duplicate their adolescent (teenage) agony on screen.

Childhood

Born on February 8, 1931, in Marion, Indiana, James Byron Dean was the only child of Winton and Mildred (Wilson) Dean. Winton, a dental technician (a person who creates dental appliances), moved his family to Santa Monica, California, when Dean was six years old. Dean was particularly close to his mother, who had dreams of him being a performer. She enrolled him in tap dance lessons at the age of three, and taught him violin.

In July 1940 Dean's mother died of cancer. This was a loss he would feel strongly all of his life. His father sent him back to Fairmount, Indiana, to live with Marcus and Ortense Winslow, Winton Dean's sister and brother-in-law. In Fairmount Dean grew up in

Born: February 8, 1931
Marion, Indiana
Died: September 30, 1955
Paso Robles, California
American actor
his aunt and uncle’s rural Quaker home, helping with farm chores and enjoying a reasonably carefree existence. He enjoyed swimming and ice-skating, and was interested in cars. He played guard on the high school basketball team and excelled at debate and drama.

First acting roles

After graduating in 1949, Dean left for Los Angeles, California, and lived briefly with his father and stepmother. He entered Santa Monica City College, majoring in pre-law, but it was drama in which he shone. The following year he transferred to the University of California, Los Angeles. Befriended by actor James Whitmore (1924–), Dean obtained a small part in a television drama, *Hill Number One*.

Soon Dean quit college and worked as a parking lot attendant, participating in auditions whenever they were available. In 1951, after landing only bit parts and a small role in *Fixed Bayonets*, a war picture, he left Hollywood for New York. There, in 1953, he landed a spot in the Actors Studio run by Lee Strasberg (1901–1982).

Dean obtained a small part in *See the Jaguar*, which opened at the Cort Theatre on Broadway in 1952. After this his career took off. He did television plays and several more Broadway productions. He also developed a reputation for being talented but hard to work with. Television required precise coordination of cameras and actors. However, Dean was either unable or unwilling to repeat a gesture, move, or speech the same way. Despite this he won the Daniel Blum Theatre World Award for “best newcomer” of the 1953 to 1954 season for his role in *The Immoralist*.

Three movies

In March 1954 director Elia Kazan (1909–), who knew Dean from Actors Studio days, offered him a role in the film *East of Eden*. Dean was picked for two more parts. He finished filming *Rebel Without a Cause*, with Sal Mineo (1939–1976) and Natalie Wood (1938–1981) in June 1955 and began work on *Giant*. He costarred in this movie with Elizabeth Taylor (1932–) and Rock Hudson (1925–1985). Filming of *Giant* was completed in September and Dean was to start rehearsing for a new play, *The Corn Is Green*. But Dean had a few days free time in which he decided to do some car racing.
Dean had bought a Porsche Spyder, which he planned to race in Salinas, California. On September 30, he and his mechanic, Rolf Wuetherich, were involved in a head-on collision at Paso Robles, California. Dean died in the crash. He was buried in Fairmount, Indiana, on October 8, 1955. Three thousand people attended his funeral.

Less than a month later, Rebel Without a Cause opened in New York City and the Dean legend began. Warner Brothers received mountains of mail. Young people all over the world considered Dean a symbol of their frustrations. In 1956 he was nominated for Best Actor Oscars for his roles in East of Eden and Giant. He also received numerous foreign awards, including the French Crystal Star award and the Japanese Million Pearl award. By June 1956 there were dozens of fan clubs, and rumors flourished that Dean was not dead, only severely injured.

Many who acted with Dean thought he had exceptional talent. Perhaps the most enduring part of James Dean’s legend is the belief that beauty is ultimately destroyed by violence. That legend is kept alive by numerous books and a festival in Fairmount that more than fifty thousand people attend each year on the anniversary of his fatal accident.

For More Information
hired Debussy to teach her children piano. He traveled to Italy and Austria with her and her family and spent parts of the next two years at her estate in Russia.

Different musical influences

In 1884 Debussy won the Prix de Rome, a competition for composers, for his cantata (a poem set to music) The Prodigal Son. While in Rome, Italy, the following year, he wrote that one of the few things that made him forget how much he missed Paris was the study of German composer Richard Wagner's (1813–1883) opera Tristan und Isolde. (Debussy returned to Paris in 1887.) Not many years later Debussy strongly criticized Wagner, but this had more to do with Wagner’s drama than his music. Although Debussy scorned the characters in Wagner’s Parsifal, he openly praised the music. Throughout his life Debussy was fascinated by the richness of Wagner's style, although he generally preferred opera that was less flashy.

Debussy was also strongly affected by the Javanese gamelan, which he saw performed at the Paris World Exposition of 1889. This orchestra, with its variety of bells, gongs, and xylophones (instruments made up of a series of wooden bars that sound different notes when struck with two small hammers), produced a series of soft effects and rhythms that Debussy loved. The years between 1890 and 1900 brought the elements of the gamelan into play with others already present in Debussy’s style and produced a new kind of sound. The completion of this process around 1900 can serve as a line dividing the masterpieces of the earlier years—Ariettes oubliées (1888), Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune (1892; Afternoon of a Faun), and the String Quartet (1893)—from those composed during Debussy's mature period.

Mature period

Debussy’s first large-scale piece of his mature period, the Nocturnes for orchestra (1893–99), was produced while he was working on his only completed opera, Pelléas et Mélisande (1894–1902), based on a play by Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949). The publicity surrounding the first performance of Pelléas in 1902 made Debussy the most controversial (causing disputes) musical figure in France; people either loved his music or
hated it. Pelléas is the key work of Debussy’s creative life; the words and actions of the opera pass as if in a dream, but the dream is filled with a strong feeling of dread. Debussy adds to this feeling with music that is largely quiet, with outbursts thrown in that reveal the underlying terror.

In 1904 Debussy left his wife of five years, Rosalie Texier, to live with Emma Bardac, a woman who had a decent amount of money and whom he would eventually marry. Debussy became more productive after he no longer had to worry about how he was going to earn money. During these years he wrote some of his most lasting works: La Mer (1905) and Ibéria (1908), both for orchestra; Images (1905), Children’s Corner Suite (1908), and two books of Préludes (1910–12), all for piano solo.

**Later years**

Debussy’s pieces of the following years show certain changes in style. They have less immediate appeal and are more difficult to approach. The emergence of other composers also led to declining interest in his works. His ballet Jeux, his last and most complicated orchestral score, first performed on May 15, 1913, was all but forgotten after Igor Stravinsky’s (1882–1971) ballet Rite of Spring came out on May 29. Debussy may have resented the younger composer’s arrival on the scene, but he admired Stravinsky’s work and even used certain Stravinsky-like elements in En blanc et noir (1915) and the Études (1915).

When Debussy composed these works, he was already suffering from terminal cancer. He completed only three of a planned group of six pieces “for various instruments” (1915–17) before dying in Paris on March 25, 1918.

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**For More Information**


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**Ruby Dee**

**Born:** October 27, 1924

Cleveland, Ohio

African American actress

Ruby Dee’s acting career has spanned more than fifty years and has included theater, radio, television, and movies. She has also been active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

**The early years**

Ruby Dee was born Ruby Ann Wallace on October 27, 1924, in Cleveland, Ohio. Her parents, Marshall and Emma Wallace, moved the family to Harlem in New York City when Dee was just a baby. In the evening Dee, her two sisters, and her brother
read aloud to each other from the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882), William Wordsworth (1770–1850), and Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906). As a teenager Dee submitted poetry to the New York Amsterdam News, a black weekly newspaper. Later in life, Dee admitted that during those years she was a shy girl but that she always felt a burning desire to express herself.

Pursued education

Dee’s love of English and poetry motivated her to study the arts. She attended Hunter High School, one of New York’s first-rate schools that drew the brightest girls. While in high school, Dee decided to pursue acting.

After graduation Dee entered Hunter College. There she joined the American Negro Theater (ANT) and adopted the stage name Ruby Dee. While still at Hunter College, Dee took a class in radio training offered through the American Theater Wing. This training led to a part in the radio serial Nora Drake. After college Dee worked as a French and Spanish translator. She knew, however, that the theater was to be her destiny.

First Broadway role

In 1946 Dee got her first Broadway role in Jeb, a drama about a returning African American war hero. There she met Ossie Davis, the actor in the title role. They became close friends and were married on December 9, 1948.

Dee’s first movie was Love in Syncopation, released in 1946. In 1950 she appeared in The Jackie Robinson Story and in No Way Out. In 1957 Dee appeared in Edge of the City. Over the next decade, Dee appeared in several plays and movies including A Raisin in the Sun and Davis’s play Purlie Victorious. In 1965 Ruby Dee became the first African American actress to appear in major roles at the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut. Her musical satire Take It from the Top opened in New York in 1979.

Beginning in the early 1960s, Dee made numerous appearances on television including roles in the Play of the Week and in several series. In 1968 she became the first African American actress to be featured on Peyton Place. In 1970 she starred in the critically acclaimed play Boesman and Lena.