



# American Legends: The Life of Betty Grable

*Charles River Editors*

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“There are two reasons why I'm in show business, and I'm standing on both of them.” – Betty Grable

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.

No history of American pop culture in the 1940s would be complete without mention of Betty Grable, the most popular pin-up girl of the World War II era. Grable possessed the outstanding fortune of not only having an ideal body but arriving at the most fortuitous time imaginable; the famous pin-up photo of her, taken by Frank Powolny, made her the highest-earning actress in Hollywood from 1943 to 1951. Indeed, it was not hyperbole that earned Grable the nickname of “the girl with the million dollar legs” — not only were her legs famously adored by American soldiers fighting overseas, they were actually insured to the tune of one million dollars (Suddath). Grable was the banner actress for the era before the advent of Playboy and other publications designed to satisfy the lust of the heterosexual male, an era that objectified women but in a more wholesome, less pornographic way that was designed to reinforce all-American values.

However, if Grable was, monetarily speaking, the most successful actress of the 1940s, there is a major gulf between her commercial success and the critical appraisal of her acting talents. Grable never won an Academy Award, and the swift demise of her career testifies to her inability to sustain her career after she had begun to age and her glamour showed signs of atrophy. In a famous quote, Grable once noted she was “the kind of girl truck drivers like,” a statement that simultaneously encapsulates her wide appeal but also the lack of sophistication that precluded her recognition among the premier acting talents of 1940s Hollywood (McLean 180). Decades later, her films are largely forgotten, which isn't surprising since they were a collection of movies that were designed to gain quick commercial success rather than long-term critical acclaim. Certainly, Grable should be acknowledged for her acting career, but her fame rests more on the impact she had on wartime American culture than the intrinsic value of any of her films.

American Legends: The Life of Betty Grable looks at the significance of Betty Grable's place in war-era America, as well as her acting career, exploring how she came to gain such unprecedented popularity. This includes not just her rise to fame but also the reasons why her career did not last as long as many of her contemporaries in Hollywood, women like Katharine Hepburn, Joan Crawford, and Bette Davis. By analyzing her triumphs and adversities, it's possible to understand the whirlwind life and career of Betty Grable, and along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Betty Grable like never before, in no time at all.

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