



American Legends: The Life of Bruce Lee

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures.

*Includes Lee's own quotes about his life, martial arts, and philosophy.

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“When you're talking about fighting, as it is, with no rules, well then, baby you'd better train every part of your body!” – Bruce Lee

“The slender, swift Bruce Lee was the Fred Astaire of martial arts, and many of the fights that could be merely brutal come across as lightning-fast choreography.” – Pauline Kael’s review of *Enter the Dragon*

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.

It would be nearly impossible for someone to pack more action into 32 years than Bruce Lee, whose name remains practically synonymous with martial arts excellence and kung fu movies. He was undoubtedly the forerunner to martial arts stars who came in his wake, including Chuck Norris and Jackie Chan, a feat made all the more impressive by the fact that he grew up as a sickly child. His upbringing was simultaneously one of great privilege and hardship, which had a huge impact on his career down the road; even when he began to fill out his skinny frame, trouble on the streets created a whirlwind set of circumstances that all but required Lee to move to America before he was 20.

Despite being the most famous star of the genre and the man who almost singlehandedly popularized martial arts in the West, the films that helped make Lee a global icon were not even made in the United States but were instead shot and produced in Hong Kong, after which they received large-scale international distribution. Furthermore, for all of his fame, none of Bruce Lee’s movies are commonly regarded as masterpieces, and they have always been viewed more as popular entertainment than as significant artistic achievements. Some might be able to name the short list of movies in which he starred and may know that *Enter the Dragon* (1973) is his most iconic picture, but his movies were never among those considered for Academy Award nominations.

Nonetheless, Bruce Lee has not been neglected by serious scholars of cinema, a fact that attests to the cultural significance of his films and his own star image. That Lee was able to become an international icon is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that he died suddenly and unexpectedly before the age of 33, leaving many to reasonably argue that he had yet to even reach the pinnacle of his career. As it was, the list of accomplishments speaks to his relentless work schedule and unparalleled drive.

Bruce Lee was arguably the greatest martial artist who ever lived, but he’s also remembered today for being spiritual and philosophical. In addition to writing at length about those topics, Lee considered those elements essential to his physical fitness and training. In reference to a form of martial arts that came to bear his name, he explained, “Too much time is given to the development of skill and too little to the development of the individual for participation...[Jeet Kune Do] ultimately is not a matter of petty techniques but of highly developed spirituality and physique.”

In the process of becoming so famous, Lee played an outsized part in changing the representation of Asians on screen and in pop culture, even though Lee was both a product of his cultural background and someone who broke away from his background and challenged cultural conventions. *American Legends: The Life of Bruce Lee* examines the life and career of the world's most famous martial artist. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Bruce Lee like never before, in no time at all.

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