



# James Dean: Rebel With A Cause (Indiana Biography)

*Wes D. Gehring*

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On September 30, 1955, a budding movie star who had just completed a rigorous schedule that included three films, set out on a trip to participate in a sports-car race in Salinas, California. James Dean never made it to his destination. Instead, Dean's silver Porsche 550 Spyder was hit head-on by another motorist. Dean, the actor from Fairmount, Indiana, had died. Dean, the legend, was born. Even today, fans of the actor make annual pilgrimages to Dean's Indiana grave site.

In this third volume of the Indiana Historical Society Press's Indiana Biography Series, Wes D. Gehring, a noted authority on film, takes a fresh look at Dean's life, exploring the actor's early days growing up on his beloved aunt and uncle's farm in Fairmount to his struggle for success as an actor in television and on Broadway to his meteoric rise to fame in Hollywood. The biography also features a foreword written by Conrad Lane, Ball State University professor emeriti and a longtime film essayist.

For too long, Gehring argues, Dean has been totally confused with the troubled teenager he played in the movies, most powerfully in the classic *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). The real Dean was a hardworking actor equipped with a clear agenda for success. The biography examines how Dean consciously posed as an angst-ridden youth. "Indeed," notes Gehring, "it was easily his greatest and most sustained acting job."

In addition, the book highlights the key influence Indiana played on Dean's life. Instead of a meaningless stop on his road to success, the state, especially the tight-knit community of Fairmount, offered the budding star sustained encouragement and support through good times and bad. Readers will also discover Dean's comic ability among friends and family, including his always popular imitations of such fellow acting greats as Charlie Chaplin and Marlon Brando.

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