

This Day in History... June 1, 1926

Birth of Marilyn Monroe

Marilyn Monroe was born Norma Jeane Mortenson on June 1, 1926, in Los Angeles, California. Dubbed the “Blonde Bombshell,” she was one of the most popular actresses of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Norma Jeane had an unsettled childhood and bounced around orphanages and foster homes. She married James Dougherty just days after her 16th birthday, in 1942. James served in the Merchant Marine during World War II, and Norma Jeane took a job at the Radioplane Munitions Factory. Her job was to spray fire retardant on airplane parts and inspect parachutes. However, one day in 1945, an Army photographer named David Conover took her picture for a series of “women war workers” for *Yank* magazine. Conover was assigned to the job by US Air Force Captain Ronald Reagan.

After that, Norma Jeane went to work for Blue Book Modeling Agency and became a successful model, appearing on numerous magazine covers. It was during this time that she dyed her hair blonde. She tried nine different shades of blonde before settling on platinum. A year after her first modeling pictures, she was given a screen test by 20th Century Fox.



Monroe was the first honoree in the Legends of Hollywood Series, and her stamp was issued on her 69th birthday.

“It’s Jean Harlow all over again!” said studio executive Ben Lyon at the screen test. That was no coincidence – when Norma Jeane was a little girl, one of her guardians, Grace McKee, was fascinated with Jean Harlow (a famous Hollywood beauty). Grace and young Norma Jeane frequently went to the movies and Norma Jeane’s hair was curled to resemble Harlow’s. As a model, she studied photos of Harlow.

Lyon offered her a standard six-month contract of \$125 a week. It was at this time that she changed her name to “Marilyn Monroe.” Lyon told her she reminded him of actress Marilyn Miller, so she took the first name and added her grandmother’s name “Monroe.”



Warhol produced several silkscreen paintings of Monroe based on a 1953 Niagara publicity photo.

Monroe’s first film, in which she had a small part, was *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* in 1947. Monroe continued to work steadily, but did not become a star until 1953’s *Niagara* skyrocketed her career. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire* closely followed it, both also released in 1953. After *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Monroe was invited to sign her name and put her hand and footprints in the concrete in front of Grauman’s Chinese Theater on Hollywood Boulevard. At the age of 27, Monroe was voted the Best New Actress of 1953 by *Photoplay* magazine.

By 1955, Monroe grew tired of her kooky blonde image and was ready to begin a serious acting career. She moved to New York to learn from Lee Strasberg. In 1956, she started her own motion picture company, which produced *Bus Stop* and *The Prince and the Showgirl*. In 1959, Monroe was awarded a Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Comedy for her performance in *Some Like It Hot*. In 1962, she received a Golden Globe for Female World Film Favorite.

For about a decade, Monroe was a top-billed actress, with her films grossing \$200 million. But she struggled with depression and addiction for several years and ultimately died from an overdose on August 5, 1962, at the age of just 36. Monroe completed thirty movies during her lifetime, leaving *Something’s Got to Give* unfinished.

Long after her death, Monroe is still respected and revered as one of America’s great Hollywood legends. A 1999 American Film Institute list ranked her at number six on their list of the greatest female screen legends from the Golden Age of Hollywood. Additionally, the Smithsonian Institution included her on their list of the 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time.



Monroe and DiMaggio were married for just nine months in 1954. However, they maintained a close friendship and it was rumored they may have been planning to remarry at the time of Monroe’s death. DiMaggio placed a 20-year order with a flower shop to deliver roses to her grave.

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