



American Legends: The Life of Harry Houdini

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures of Houdini and his most famous escape acts.

*Includes descriptions of Houdini's most famous stunts.

*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

"I knew, as everyone knows, that the easiest way to attract a crowd is to let it be known that at a given time and a given place some one is going to attempt something that in the event of failure will mean sudden death. That's what attracts us to the man who paints the flagstaff on the tall building, or to the 'human fly' who scales the walls of the same building." – Harry Houdini

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.

There is no shortage of professional magicians and stunt men in the 21st century, but all of them owe something to the most famous stunt man of them all, Harry Houdini. A century after he began to thrill audiences with his patented escape acts, Houdini's name remains synonymous with seemingly miraculous escapes and getaways, and his name is instantly recognizable even among those who have never seen pictures of his stunts.

Houdini wasn't the first of his kind, but after he got his start as "Harry Handcuff Houdini" during a traveling European tour, he added the kind of showmanship and flair that have become standard fare among performers of his kind. His initial repertoire of escaping handcuffs eventually gave way to far grander feats, involving skyscrapers, straitjackets, and being buried alive.

With fame came skepticism, and Houdini was frequently accused of being a fake and fixing his escapes. Some even believed he was helped by supernatural forces. Skeptics were bolstered by the fact that, like his escapes and magic tricks, Houdini remained a man shrouded in mystery, constantly changing his own life story to reinvent himself as he thought fit. Though Houdini insisted his stunts were real and constantly went after those who besmirched him or his profession, his success couldn't help but breed both legends and criticism simultaneously.

By the end of his life, Houdini had transformed himself into a national celebrity, and he tried to dabble in acting and other pursuits, but he was destined to be forever associated with the profession he helped pioneer. And fittingly, mystery and controversy surrounded the exact cause of his death, as it had so much of his life. American Legends: The Life of Harry Houdini profiles the life, legends, stunts, and controversies of history's most famous escape artist, with pictures of important people, places, and events. You will learn about Houdini like you never have before, in no time at all.

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