

= James Cagney =

James Francis Cagney , Jr . (July 17 , 1899 ? March 30 , 1986) was an American actor and dancer , both on stage and in film , though he had his greatest impact in film . Known for his consistently energetic performances , distinctive vocal style , and deadpan comic timing , he won acclaim and major awards for a wide variety of performances . He is best remembered for playing multifaceted tough guys in movies such as *The Public Enemy* (1931) , *Taxi !* (1932) , *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) , and *White Heat* (1949) and was even typecast or limited by this view earlier in his career . In 1999 , the American Film Institute ranked him eighth among its list of greatest male stars of Classic Hollywood Cinema . Orson Welles said of Cagney , " [he was] maybe the greatest actor who ever appeared in front of a camera " , and Stanley Kubrick considered him to be one of the best actors of all time .

In his first professional acting performance , Cagney danced costumed as a woman in the chorus line of the 1919 revue *Every Sailor* . He spent several years in vaudeville as a dancer and comedian , until he got his first major acting part in 1925 . He secured several other roles , receiving good notices , before landing the lead in the 1929 play *Penny Arcade* . After rave reviews , Warner Bros. signed him for an initial \$ 500 @-@ a @-@ week , three @-@ week contract to reprise his role ; this was quickly extended to a seven @-@ year contract .

Cagney 's seventh film , *The Public Enemy* , became one of the most influential gangster movies of the period . Notable for a famous scene in which Cagney pushes a grapefruit against Mae Clark 's face , the film thrust him into the spotlight . He became one of Hollywood 's biggest stars and one of Warner Bros. ' biggest contracts . In 1938 , he received his first Academy Award for Best Actor nomination , for *Angels with Dirty Faces* for his subtle portrayal of the tough guy / man @-@ child Rocky Sullivan . In 1942 , Cagney won the Oscar for his energetic portrayal of George M. Cohan in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* . He was nominated a third time in 1955 for *Love Me or Leave Me* . Cagney retired from acting and dancing in 1961 to spend time on his farm with his family . He exited retirement , 20 years later , for a part in the 1981 movie *Ragtime* , mainly to aid his recovery from a stroke .

Cagney walked out on Warner Bros. several times over the course of his career , each time returning on much improved personal and artistic terms . In 1935 , he sued Warners for breach of contract and won . This was one of the first times an actor prevailed over a studio on a contract issue . He worked for an independent film company for a year while the suit was being settled ? and established his own production company , Cagney Productions , in 1942 , before returning to Warners four years later . In reference to Cagney 's refusal to be pushed around , Jack L. Warner called him " the Professional Againstster " . Cagney also made numerous morale @-@ boosting troop tours before and during World War II , and was president of the Screen Actors Guild for two years .

= = Early life = =

Cagney was born on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City . His biographers disagree as to the actual location : either on the corner of Avenue D and 8th Street or in a top @-@ floor apartment at 391 East Eighth . His father , James Francis Cagney , Sr. , was of Irish descent . By the time of his son 's birth , he was a bartender and amateur boxer , though on Cagney 's birth certificate , he is listed as a telegraphist . His mother was Carolyn (née Nelson) ; her father was a Norwegian ship captain while her mother was Irish .

Cagney was the second of seven children , two of whom died within months of birth . He was sickly as a young child ? so much so that his mother feared he would die before he could be baptized . He later attributed his sickness to the poverty his family had to endure . The family moved twice while he was still young , first to East 79th Street , and then to East 96th Street . He was confirmed at St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church in Manhattan , where he would eventually have his funeral service .

The red @-@ haired , blue @-@ eyed Cagney graduated from Stuyvesant High School in New York City , in 1918 , and attended Columbia College of Columbia University , where he intended to

major in Art . He also took German and joined the Student Army Training Corps but dropped out after one semester , returning home upon the death of his father during the 1918 flu pandemic .

Cagney held a variety of jobs early in his life , giving all his earnings to his family : junior architect , copy boy for The New York Sun , book custodian at the New York Public Library , bellhop , draughtsman , and night doorkeeper . While Cagney was working for the New York Public Library , he met Florence James , who helped him into an acting career . Cagney believed in hard work , later stating , " It was good for me . I feel sorry for the kid who has too cushy a time of it . Suddenly he has to come face @-@ to @-@ face with the realities of life without any mama or papa to do his thinking for him . "

He started tap dancing as a boy (a skill that eventually contributed to his Academy Award) and was nicknamed " Cellar @-@ Door Cagney " after his habit of dancing on slanted cellar doors . He was a good street fighter , defending his older brother Harry , a medical student , when necessary . He engaged in amateur boxing , and was a runner @-@ up for the New York State lightweight title . His coaches encouraged him to turn professional , but his mother would not allow it . He also played semiprofessional baseball for a local team , and entertained dreams of playing in the Major Leagues .

His introduction to films was unusual . When visiting an aunt who lived in Brooklyn opposite Vitagraph Studios , Cagney would climb over the fence to watch the filming of John Bunny movies . He became involved in amateur dramatics , starting as a scenery boy for a Chinese pantomime at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House , one of the first settlement houses in the nation , where his brother Harry performed and his soon @-@ to @-@ be friend , Florence James , directed . He was initially content working behind the scenes and had no interest in performing . One night , however , Harry became ill , and although Cagney was not an understudy , his photographic memory of rehearsals enabled him to stand in for his brother without making a single mistake . Therefore , Florence James has the unique distinction of being the first director to put him on a stage . Afterward , he joined a number of companies as a performer in a variety of roles .

= = Career = =

= = = 1919 ? 30 : Early career = = =

While working at Wanamaker 's Department Store in 1919 , Cagney learned , from a colleague who had seen him dance , of a role in the upcoming production Every Sailor . A wartime play in which the chorus was made up of servicemen dressed as women , it was originally titled Every Woman . Cagney auditioned for the role of a chorus girl , despite considering it a waste of time ; he only knew one dance step , the complicated Peabody , but he knew it perfectly . This was enough to convince the producers that he could dance , and he copied the other dancers ' moves while waiting to go on . He did not find it odd to play a woman , nor was he embarrassed . He later recalled how he was able to shed his own natural shy persona when he stepped onto the stage : " For there I am not myself . I am not that fellow , Jim Cagney , at all . I certainly lost all consciousness of him when I put on skirts , wig , paint , powder , feathers and spangles . "

Had Cagney 's mother had her way , his stage career would have ended when he quit Every Sailor after two months ; proud as she was of his performance , she preferred that he get an education . Cagney appreciated the \$ 35 a week he was paid , which he called " a mountain of money for me in those worrisome days . " In deference to his mother 's worries , he got employment as a brokerage house runner . This did not stop him looking for more stage work , however , and he went on to successfully audition for a chorus part in the William B. Friedlander musical Pitter Patter , for which he earned \$ 55 a week ? he sent \$ 40 to his mother each week . So strong was his habit of holding down more than one job at a time , he also worked as a dresser for one of the leads , portered the casts ' luggage , and understudied for the lead . Among the chorus line performers was 16 @-@ year @-@ old Frances Willard " Billie " Vernon , whom he married in 1922 .

The show began Cagney 's 10 @-@ year association with vaudeville and Broadway . Cagney and

his wife were among the early residents of Free Acres , a social experiment established by Bolton Hall in Berkeley Heights , New Jersey .

Pitter Patter was not hugely successful , but it did well enough to run for 32 weeks , enabling Cagney to join the vaudeville circuit . Vernon and he toured separately with a number of different troupes , reuniting as " Vernon and Nye " to do simple comedy routines and musical numbers . " Nye " was a rearrangement of the last syllable of Cagney 's surname . One of the troupes Cagney joined was Parker , Rand , and Leach , taking over the spot vacated when Archie Leach ? who later changed his name to Cary Grant ? left .

After years of touring and struggling to make money , Cagney and Vernon moved to Hawthorne , California , in 1924 , partly for Cagney to meet his new mother @-@ in @-@ law , who had just moved there from Chicago , and partly to investigate breaking into the movies . Their train fares were paid for by a friend , the press officer of Pitter Patter , who was also desperate to act . They were not successful at first ; the dance studio Cagney set up had few clients and folded , and Vernon and he toured the studios , but garnered no interest . Eventually , they borrowed some money and headed back to New York via Chicago and Milwaukee , enduring failure along the way when they attempted to make money on the stage .

Cagney secured his first significant nondancing role in 1925 . He played a young tough guy in the three @-@ act play Outside Looking In by Maxwell Anderson , earning \$ 200 a week . As with Pitter Patter , Cagney went to the audition with little confidence he would get the part . He had no experience with drama at this point . Cagney felt that he only got the role because his hair was redder than that of Alan Bunce , the only other red @-@ headed performer in New York . Both the play and Cagney received good reviews ; Life magazine wrote , " Mr. Cagney , in a less spectacular role [than his co @-@ star] makes a few minutes silence during his mock @-@ trial scene something that many a more established actor might watch with profit . " Burns Mantle wrote that it " ... contained the most honest acting now to be seen in New York . "

Following the show 's four @-@ month run , Cagney went back to vaudeville for the next few years . He achieved varied success , but after appearing in Outside Looking In , the Cagneys were more financially secure . During this period , he met George M. Cohan , whom he later portrayed in Yankee Doodle Dandy , though they never spoke .

Cagney secured the lead role in the 1926 ? 27 season West End production of Broadway by George Abbott . The show 's management insisted that he copy Broadway lead Lee Tracy 's performance , despite Cagney 's discomfort in doing so , but the day before the show sailed for England , they decided to replace him . This was a devastating turn of events for Cagney ; apart from the logistical difficulties this presented ? the couple 's luggage was in the hold of the ship and they had given up their apartment . He almost quit show business . As Vernon recalled , " Jimmy said that it was all over . He made up his mind that he would get a job doing something else . "

The Cagneys had run @-@ of @-@ the @-@ play contracts , which lasted as long as the play did . Vernon was in the chorus line of the show , and with help from the Actors ? Equity Association , Cagney understudied Tracy on the Broadway show , providing them with a desperately needed steady income . Cagney also established a dance school for professionals , then landed a part in the play Women Go On Forever , directed by John Cromwell , which ran for four months . By the end of the run , Cagney was exhausted from acting and running the dance school .

He had built a reputation as an innovative teacher , so when he was cast as the lead in Grand Street Follies of 1928 , he was also appointed the choreographer . The show received rave reviews and was followed by Grand Street Follies of 1929 . These roles led to a part in George Kelly 's Maggie the Magnificent , a play the critics disliked , though they liked Cagney 's performance . Cagney saw this role (and Women Go on Forever) as significant because of the talented directors he met . He learned " ... what a director was for and what a director could do . They were directors who could play all the parts in the play better than the actors cast for them . "

== = 1930 ? 35 : Warner Bros. == =

Playing opposite Cagney in Maggie the Magnificent was Joan Blondell , who starred again with him

a few months later in Marie Baumer 's new play Penny Arcade . While the critics panned Penny Arcade , they praised Cagney and Blondell . Al Jolson , sensing film potential , bought the rights for \$ 20 @, @ 000 . He then sold the play to Warner Bros. , with the stipulation that they cast Cagney and Blondell in the film version . Retitled Sinners ' Holiday , the film was released in 1930 . Cagney was given a \$ 500 @-@ a @-@ week , three @-@ week contract . In the film , he portrays Harry Delano , a tough guy who becomes a killer , but generates sympathy because of his unfortunate upbringing . This role of the sympathetic " bad " guy was a recurring character type for Cagney throughout his career . During filming of Sinners ' Holiday , he also demonstrated the stubbornness that characterized his work attitude . He later recalled an argument he had with director John Adolphi about a line : " There was a line in the show where I was supposed to be crying on my mother 's breast ... [The line] was ' I 'm your baby , ain 't I ? ' I refused to say it . Adolphi said ' I 'm going to tell Zanuck . ' I said ' I don 't give a shit what you tell him , I 'm not going to say that line . ' " They took the line out .

Despite this outburst , the studio liked him , and before his three @-@ week contract was up ? while the film was still shooting ? they gave Cagney a three @-@ week extension , which was followed by a full seven @-@ year contract at \$ 400 a week . The contract , however , allowed Warners to drop him at the end of any 40 @-@ week period , effectively only guaranteeing him 40 weeks income at a time . As when he was growing up , Cagney shared his income with his family . Cagney received good reviews , and immediately starred in another gangster role in The Doorway to Hell . The film was a financial hit , helping cement Cagney 's growing reputation . He made four more movies before his breakthrough role .

Warner Brothers ' succession of gangster movie hits , in particular Little Caesar with Edward G. Robinson , culminated with the 1931 film The Public Enemy . Due to the strong reviews in his short film career , Cagney was cast as nice @-@ guy Matt Doyle , opposite Edward Woods as Tom Powers . However , after the initial rushes , each was reassigned the other 's part . The film cost only \$ 151 @, @ 000 to make , but it became one of the first low @-@ budget films to gross \$ 1 million .

Cagney received widespread praise for his role . The New York Herald Tribune described his performance as " ... the most ruthless , unsentimental appraisal of the meanness of a petty killer the cinema has yet devised . " He received top billing after the film , but while he acknowledged the importance of the role to his career , he always disputed that it changed the way heroes and leading men were portrayed ; he cited Clark Gable 's slapping of Barbara Stanwyck six months earlier (in Night Nurse) as more important . Night Nurse was actually released three months after The Public Enemy , and Gable punched Stanwyck in the film , knocking her character unconscious , then carried her across the hall , where she woke up later .

Many critics view the scene in which Cagney pushes a grapefruit into Mae Clarke 's face as one of the most famous moments in movie history . The scene itself was a late addition , and who thought of the idea is a matter of debate . Producer Darryl Zanuck claimed he thought of it in a script conference , director William Wellman claimed that the idea came to him when he saw the grapefruit on the table during the shoot , and writers Glasmon and Bright claimed it was based on the real life of gangster Hymie Weiss , who threw an omelette into his girlfriend 's face . Cagney himself usually cited the writers ' version , but the fruit 's victim , Clarke , agreed that it was Wellman 's idea , saying , " I 'm sorry I ever agreed to do the grapefruit bit . I never dreamed it would be shown in the movie . Director Bill Wellman thought of the idea suddenly . It wasn 't even written into the script . " .

However , according to Turner Classic Movies (TCM) , the grapefruit scene was a practical joke that Cagney and costar Mae Clarke decided to play on the crew while the cameras were rolling . Wellman liked it so much that he left it in . TCM also notes that the scene made Clarke 's ex @-@ husband , Lew Brice , very happy . " He saw the film repeatedly just to see that scene , and was often shushed by angry patrons when his delighted laughter got too loud . "

Filmmakers have mimicked it many times , such as Lee Marvin 's character splashing scalding coffee in the face of Gloria Grahame in The Big Heat . Cagney himself was offered grapefruit in almost every restaurant he visited for years after , and Clarke claimed it virtually ruined her career because of typecasting .

Cagney's stubbornness became well known behind the scenes, not least after his refusal to join in a 100 % participation @-@ free charity drive pushed by Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Cagney did not object to donating money to charity, but rather to being forced to. Already he had acquired the nickname "The Professional Againstster".

Warner Bros. was quick to team its two rising gangster stars ? Edward G. Robinson and Cagney ? for the 1931 film Smart Money. So keen was the studio to follow up the success of Robinson's Little Caesar that Cagney actually shot Smart Money (for which he received second billing in a supporting role) at the same time as The Public Enemy. As in The Public Enemy, Cagney was required to be physically violent to a woman on screen, a signal that Warner Bros. was keen to keep Cagney in the public eye. This time, he slapped co @-@ star Evalyn Knapp.

With the introduction of the United States Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, and particularly its edicts concerning on @-@ screen violence, Warners allowed Cagney a change of pace. They cast him in the comedy Blonde Crazy, again opposite Blondell. As he completed filming, The Public Enemy was filling cinemas with all @-@ night showings. Cagney began to compare his pay with his peers, thinking his contract allowed for salary adjustments based on the success of his films. Warner Bros. disagreed, however, and refused to give him a raise. The studio heads also insisted that Cagney continue promoting their films, even ones he was not in, which he opposed. Cagney moved back to New York, leaving his brother Bill to look after his apartment.

While Cagney was in New York, his brother, who had effectively become his agent, angled for a substantial pay raise and more personal freedom for his brother. The success of The Public Enemy and Blonde Crazy forced Warner Bros. ' hand. They eventually offered Cagney a contract for \$ 1000 a week. Cagney's first film upon returning from New York was 1932's Taxi!. The film is notable for not only being the first time that Cagney danced on screen, but it was also the last time he allowed himself to be shot at with live ammunition (a relatively common occurrence at the time, as blank cartridges and squibs were considered too expensive and hard to find to use in most motion picture filming). He had been shot at in The Public Enemy, but during filming for Taxi!, he was almost hit.

In his opening scene, Cagney spoke fluent Yiddish, a language he had picked up during his boyhood in New York City. Critics praised the film.

Taxi! was the source of one of Cagney's most misquoted lines; he never actually said, "MMMmmm, you dirty rat!", a line commonly used by impressionists. The closest he got to it in the film was, "Come out and take it, you dirty, yellow @-@ bellied rat, or I'll give it to you through the door!" The film was swiftly followed by The Crowd Roars and Winner Take All.

Despite his success, Cagney remained dissatisfied with his contract. He wanted more money for his successful films, but he also offered to take a smaller salary should his star wane. Warner Bros. refused, so Cagney once again walked out. He held out for \$ 4000 a week, the same salary as Edward G. Robinson, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Kay Francis. Warner Bros. refused to cave in this time, and suspended Cagney. Cagney announced that he would do his next three pictures for free if they canceled the five years remaining on his contract. He also threatened to quit Hollywood and go back to Columbia University to follow his brothers into medicine. After six months of suspension, Frank Capra brokered a deal that increased Cagney's salary to around \$ 3000 a week, and guaranteed top billing and no more than four films a year.

Having learned about the block @-@ booking studio system that almost guaranteed the studios huge profits, Cagney was determined to spread the wealth. He regularly sent money and goods to old friends from his neighborhood, though he did not generally make this known. His insistence on no more than four films a year was based on his having witnessed actors ? even teenagers ? regularly being worked 100 hours a week to turn out more films. This experience was an integral reason for his involvement in forming the Screen Actors Guild in 1933.

Cagney returned to the studio and made Hard to Handle in 1933. This was followed by a steady stream of films, including the highly regarded Footlight Parade, which gave Cagney the chance to return to his song @-@ and @-@ dance roots. The film includes show @-@ stopping scenes with Busby Berkeley @-@ choreographed routines. His next notable film was 1934's Here Comes the Navy, which paired him with Pat O'Brien for the first time. The two would have an enduring

friendship .

In 1935 , Cagney was listed as one of the Top Ten Moneymakers in Hollywood for the first time , and was cast more frequently in nongangster roles ; he played a lawyer who joins the FBI in *G-Men* , and he also took on his first , and only , Shakespearean role , as top billed Nick Bottom in *A Midsummer Night 's Dream* alongside Joe E. Brown as Flute and Mickey Rooney as Puck

Cagney 's last movie in 1935 was *Ceiling Zero* , his third film with Pat O 'Brien . O 'Brien received top billing , which was a clear breach of Cagney 's contract . This , combined with the fact that Cagney had made five movies in 1934 , again against his contract terms , caused him to bring legal proceedings against Warner Bros. for breach of contract . The dispute dragged on for several months . Cagney received calls from David Selznick and Sam Goldwyn , but neither felt in a position to offer him work while the dispute went on . Meanwhile , while being represented by his brother William in court , Cagney went back to New York to search for a country property where he could indulge his passion for farming .

= = = 1936 ? 37 : Independent years = = =

Cagney spent most of the next year on his farm , and went back to work only when Edward L. Alperson from Grand National Films , a newly established , independent studio , approached him to make movies for \$ 100 @, @ 000 a film and 10 % of the profits . Cagney made two films for Grand National : *Great Guy* and *Something to Sing About* . He received good reviews for both , but overall the production quality was not up to Warner Bros. standards , and the films did not do well . A third film , *Dynamite* , was planned , but Grand National ran out of money .

Cagney also became involved in political causes , and in 1936 , agreed to sponsor the Hollywood Anti @-@ Nazi League . Unknown to Cagney , the League was in fact a front organization for the Communist International (Comintern) , which sought to enlist support for the Soviet Union and its foreign policies .

The courts eventually decided the Warner Bros. lawsuit in Cagney 's favor . He had done what many thought unthinkable : taking on the studios and winning . Not only did he win , but Warner Bros. also knew that he was still their foremost box office draw and invited him back for a five @-@ year , \$ 150 @, @ 000 @-@ a @-@ film deal , with no more than two pictures a year . Cagney also had full say over what films he did and did not make . Additionally , William Cagney was guaranteed the position of assistant producer for the movies in which his brother starred .

Cagney had demonstrated the power of the walkout in keeping the studios to their word . He later explained his reasons , saying , " I walked out because I depended on the studio heads to keep their word on this , that or other promise , and when the promise was not kept , my only recourse was to deprive them of my services . " Cagney himself acknowledged the importance of the walkout for other actors in breaking the dominance of the studio system . Normally , when a star walked out , the time he or she was absent was added onto the end of an already long contract , as happened with Olivia de Havilland and Bette Davis . Cagney , however , walked out and came back to a better contract . Many in Hollywood watched the case closely for hints of how future contracts might be handled .

Artistically , the Grand National experiment was a success for Cagney , who was able to move away from his traditional Warner Bros. tough guy roles to more sympathetic characters . How far he could have experimented and developed will never be known , but back in the Warner fold , he was once again playing tough guys .

= = = 1938 ? 42 : Return to Warner Bros. = = =

Cagney 's two films of 1938 , *Boy Meets Girl* and *Angels with Dirty Faces* , both costarred Pat O 'Brien . The former had Cagney in a comedy role , and received mixed reviews . Warner Bros. had allowed Cagney his change of pace , but was keen to get him back to playing tough guys , which was more lucrative . Ironically , the script for *Angels* was one that Cagney had hoped to do while with Grand National , but the studio had been unable to secure funding .

Cagney starred as Rocky Sullivan , a gangster fresh out of jail and looking for his former associate , played by Humphrey Bogart , who owes him money . While revisiting his old haunts , he runs into his old friend Jerry Connolly , played by O 'Brien , who is now a priest concerned about the Dead End Kids ' futures , particularly as they idolize Rocky . After a messy shootout , Sullivan is eventually captured by the police and sentenced to death in the electric chair . Connolly pleads with Rocky to " turn yellow " on his way to the chair so the Kids will lose their admiration for him , and hopefully avoid turning to crime . Sullivan refuses , but on his way to his execution , he breaks down and begs for his life . It is unclear whether this cowardice is real or just feigned for the Kids ' benefit . Cagney himself refused to say , insisting he liked the ambiguity . The film is regarded by many as one of Cagney 's finest , and garnered him an Academy Award for Best Actor nomination for 1938 . He lost to Spencer Tracy in Boys Town . Cagney had been considered for the role , but lost out on it due to his typecasting . (He also lost the role of Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne in Knute Rockne , All American to his friend Pat O 'Brien for the same reason .) Cagney did , however , win that year 's New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Actor .

His earlier insistence on not filming with live ammunition proved to be a good decision . Having been told while filming Angels with Dirty Faces that he would be doing a scene with real machine gun bullets (a common practice in the Hollywood of the time) , Cagney refused and insisted the shots be added afterwards . As it turned out , a ricocheting bullet passed through exactly where his head would have been .

During his first year back at Warner Bros. , Cagney became the studio 's highest earner , making \$ 324 @, @ 000 . He completed his first decade of movie @-@ making in 1939 with The Roaring Twenties , his first film with Raoul Walsh and his last with Bogart . After The Roaring Twenties , it would be a decade before Cagney made another gangsterfilm . Cagney again received good reviews ; Graham Greene stated , " Mr. Cagney , of the bull @-@ calf brow , is as always a superb and witty actor " . The Roaring Twenties was the last film in which Cagney 's character 's violence was explained by poor upbringing , or his environment , as was the case in The Public Enemy . From that point on , violence was attached to mania , as in White Heat . In 1939 , Cagney was second to only Gary Cooper in the national acting wage stakes , earning \$ 368 @, @ 333 .

His next notable role was as George M. Cohan in Yankee Doodle Dandy , a film Cagney " took great pride in " and considered his best . Producer Hal Wallis said that having seen Cohan in I 'd Rather Be Right , he never considered anyone other than Cagney for the part . Cagney , though , insisted that Fred Astaire had been the first choice , but turned it down .

Filming began the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor , and the cast and crew worked in a " patriotic frenzy " as the United States ' involvement in World War II gave the cast and crew a feeling that " they might be sending the last message from the free world " , according to actress Rosemary DeCamp . Cohan was given a private showing of the film shortly before his death , and thanked Cagney " for a wonderful job " . A paid première , with seats ranging from \$ 25 to \$ 25 @, @ 000 , raised \$ 5 @, @ 750 @, @ 000 for war bonds for the US treasury .

Many critics of the time and since have declared it Cagney 's best film , drawing parallels between Cohan and Cagney ; they both began their careers in vaudeville , struggled for years before reaching the peak of their profession , were surrounded with family and married early , and both had a wife who was happy to sit back while he went on to stardom . The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards and won three , including Cagney 's for Best Actor . In his acceptance speech , Cagney said , " I 've always maintained that in this business , you 're only as good as the other fellow thinks you are . It 's nice to know that you people thought I did a good job . And don 't forget that it was a good part , too . "

= = = 1942 ? 48 : Independent again = = =

Cagney announced in March 1942 that his brother William and he were setting up Cagney Productions to release films through United Artists . Free of Warner Bros. again , Cagney spent some time relaxing on his farm in Martha 's Vineyard before volunteering to join the USO . He spent several weeks touring the US , entertaining troops with vaudeville routines and scenes from Yankee

Doodle Dandy . In September 1942 , he was elected president of the Screen Actors Guild .

Almost a year after its creation , Cagney Productions produced its first film , Johnny Come Lately , in 1943 . While the major studios were producing patriotic war movies , Cagney was determined to continue dispelling his tough @-@ guy image , so he produced a movie that was a " complete and exhilarating exposition of the Cagney ' alter @-@ ego ' on film " . According to Cagney , the film " made money but it was no great winner " , and reviews varied from excellent (Time) to poor (New York 's PM) .

Following the film 's completion , Cagney went back to the USO and toured US military bases in the UK . He refused to give interviews to the British press , preferring to concentrate on rehearsals and performances . He gave several performances a day for the Army Signal Corps of The American Cavalcade of Dance , which consisted of a history of American dance , from the earliest days to Fred Astaire , and culminated with dances from Yankee Doodle Dandy .

The second movie Cagney 's company produced was Blood on the Sun . Insisting on doing his own stunts , Cagney required judo training from expert Ken Kuniyuki and Jack Halloran , a former policeman . The Cagneys had hoped that an action film would appeal more to audiences , but it fared worse at the box office than Johnny Come Lately . At this time , Cagney heard of young war hero Audie Murphy , who had appeared on the cover of Life magazine . Cagney thought that Murphy had the looks to be a movie star , and suggested that he come to Hollywood . Cagney felt , however , that Murphy could not act , and his contract was loaned out and then sold .

While negotiating the rights for his third independent film , Cagney starred in 20th Century Fox 's 13 Rue Madeleine for \$ 300 @, @ 000 for two months of work . The wartime spy film was a success , and Cagney was keen to begin production of his new project , an adaptation of William Saroyan 's Broadway play The Time of Your Life . Saroyan himself loved the film , but it was a commercial disaster , costing the company half a million dollars to make ; audiences again struggled to accept Cagney in a nontough @-@ guy role .

Cagney Productions was in serious trouble ; poor returns from the produced films , and a legal dispute with Sam Goldwyn Studio over a rental agreement forced Cagney back to Warner Bros. He signed a distribution @-@ production deal with the studio for the film White Heat , effectively making Cagney Productions a unit of Warner Bros.

= = = 1949 ? 55 : Back to Warner Bros. = = =

Cagney 's portrayal of Cody Jarrett in the 1949 film White Heat is one of his most memorable . Cinema had changed in the 10 years since Walsh last directed Cagney (in The Strawberry Blonde) , and the actor 's portrayal of gangsters had also changed . Unlike Tom Powers in The Public Enemy , Jarrett was portrayed as a raging lunatic with few if any sympathetic qualities . In the 18 intervening years , Cagney 's hair had begun to gray , and he developed a paunch for the first time . He was no longer a romantic commodity , and this was reflected in his performance . Cagney himself had the idea of playing Jarrett as psychotic ; he later stated , " it was essentially a cheapie one @-@ two @-@ three @-@ four kind of thing , so I suggested we make him nuts . It was agreed so we put in all those fits and headaches . "

Cagney 's final lines in the film ? " Made it , Ma ! Top of the world ! " ? was voted the 18th @-@ greatest movie line by the American Film Institute . Likewise , Jarrett 's explosion of rage in prison on being told of his mother 's death is widely hailed as one of Cagney 's most memorable performances . Some of the extras on set actually became terrified of the actor because of his violent portrayal . Cagney attributed the performance to his father 's alcoholic rages , which he had witnessed as a child , as well as someone that he had seen on a visit to a mental hospital .

The film was a critical success , though some critics wondered about the social impact of a character that they saw as sympathetic . Cagney was still struggling against his gangster typecasting . He said to a journalist , " It 's what the people want me to do . Some day , though , I 'd like to make another movie that kids could go and see . " However , Warner Bros. , perhaps searching for another Yankee Doodle Dandy , assigned Cagney a musical for his next picture , 1950 's The West Point Story with Doris Day , an actress he admired .

His next film , Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye , was another gangster movie , which was the first by Cagney Productions since its acquisition . While compared unfavorably to White Heat by critics , it was fairly successful at the box office , with \$ 500 @, @ 000 going straight to Cagney Productions ' bankers to pay off their losses . Cagney Productions was not a great success , however , and in 1953 , after William Cagney produced his last film , A Lion Is in the Streets , the company came to an end .

Cagney 's next notable role was the 1955 film Love Me or Leave Me , his third with Day . Cagney played Martin " Moe the Gimp " Snyder , a lame Jewish @-@ American gangster from Chicago , a part Spencer Tracy had turned down . Cagney described the script as " that extremely rare thing , the perfect script " . When the film was released , Snyder reportedly asked how Cagney had so accurately copied his limp , but Cagney himself insisted he had not , having based it on personal observation of other people when they limped : " What I did was very simple . I just slapped my foot down as I turned it out while walking . That 's all " .

His performance earned him another Best Actor Academy Award nomination , 17 years after his first . Reviews were strong , and the film is considered one of the best of his later career . In Day , he found a co @-@ star with whom he could build a rapport , such as he had had with Blondell at the start of his career . Day herself was full of praise for Cagney , stating that he was " the most professional actor I 've ever known . He was always ' real ' . I simply forgot we were making a picture . His eyes would actually fill up when we were working on a tender scene . And you never needed drops to make your eyes shine when Jimmy was on the set . "

Cagney 's next film was Mister Roberts , directed by John Ford and slated to star Spencer Tracy . Tracy 's involvement ensured that Cagney accepted a supporting role , although in the end , Tracy did not take part . Cagney had worked with Ford before on What Price Glory ? , and they had gotten along fairly well . However , as soon as Ford met Cagney at the airport , the director warned him that they would " tangle asses " , which caught Cagney by surprise . He later said , " I would have kicked his brains out . He was so goddamned mean to everybody . He was truly a nasty old man . " The next day , Cagney was slightly late on set , incensing Ford . Cagney cut short his imminent tirade , saying " When I started this picture , you said that we would tangle asses before this was over . I 'm ready now ? are you ? " Ford walked away , and they had no more problems , though Cagney never particularly liked Ford .

Cagney 's skill at noticing tiny details in other actors ' performances became apparent during the shooting of Mister Roberts . While watching the Kraft Music Hall anthology television show some months before , Cagney had noticed Jack Lemmon performing left @-@ handed . The first thing that Cagney asked Lemmon when they met was if he was still using his left hand . Lemmon was shocked ; he had done it on a whim , and thought no one else had noticed . He said of his co @-@ star , " his powers of observation must be absolutely incredible , in addition to the fact that he remembered it . I was very flattered . "

The film was a success , securing three Oscar nominations , including Best Picture , Best Sound Recording and Best Supporting Actor for Lemmon , who won . While Cagney was not nominated , he had thoroughly enjoyed the production . Filming on Midway Island and in a more minor role meant that he had time to relax and engage in his hobby of painting . He also drew caricatures of the cast and crew .

= = = 1955 ? 61 : Later career = = =

In 1955 , Cagney replaced Spencer Tracy on the Western film Tribute to a Bad Man for Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer . He received praise for his performance , and the studio liked his work enough to offer him These Wilder Years with Barbara Stanwyck . The two stars got on well ; they had both previously worked in vaudeville , and they entertained the cast and crew off @-@ screen by singing and dancing .

In 1956 , Cagney undertook one of his very rare television roles , starring in Robert Montgomery 's Soldiers From the War Returning . This was a favor to Montgomery , who needed a strong fall season opener to stop the network from dropping his series . Cagney 's appearance ensured that it

was a success . The actor made it clear to reporters afterwards that television was not his medium : " I do enough work in movies . This is a high @-@ tension business . I have tremendous admiration for the people who go through this sort of thing every week , but it 's not for me . "

The following year , Cagney appeared in *Man of a Thousand Faces* , in which he played Lon Chaney . He received excellent reviews , with the *New York Journal American* rating it one of his best performances , and the film , made for Universal , was a box office hit . Cagney 's skill at mimicry , combined with a physical similarity to Chaney , helped him generate empathy for his character .

Later in 1957 , Cagney ventured behind the camera for the first and only time to direct *Short Cut to Hell* , a remake of the 1941 Alan Ladd film *This Gun for Hire* , which in turn was based on the Graham Greene novel *A Gun for Sale* . Cagney had long been told by friends that he would make an excellent director , so when he was approached by his friend , producer A. C. Lyles , he instinctively said yes . He refused all offers of payment , saying he was an actor , not a director . The film was low budget , and shot quickly . As Cagney recalled , " We shot it in twenty days , and that was long enough for me . I find directing a bore , I have no desire to tell other people their business " .

In 1959 , Cagney played a labor leader in what proved to be his final musical , *Never Steal Anything Small* , which featured a comical song and dance duet with Cara Williams , who played his girlfriend .

For Cagney 's next film , he traveled to Ireland for *Shake Hands with the Devil* , directed by Michael Anderson . Cagney had hoped to spend some time tracing his Irish ancestry , but time constraints and poor weather meant that he was unable to do so . The overriding message of violence inevitably leading to more violence attracted Cagney to the role of an Irish Republican Army commander , and resulted in what some critics would regard as the finest performance of his final years .

Cagney 's career began winding down , and he made only one film in 1960 , the critically acclaimed *The Gallant Hours* , in which he played Admiral William F. " Bull " Halsey . The film , although set during the Guadalcanal Campaign in the Pacific Theater during World War II , was not a war film , but instead focused on the impact of command . Cagney Productions , which shared the production credit with Robert Montgomery 's company , made a brief return , though in name only . The film was a success , and *The New York Times* ' Bosley Crowther singled its star out for praise : " It is Mr. Cagney 's performance , controlled to the last detail , that gives life and strong , heroic stature to the principal figure in the film . There is no braggadocio in it , no straining for bold or sharp effects . It is one of the quietest , most reflective , subtlest jobs that Mr. Cagney has ever done . "

Cagney 's penultimate film was a comedy . He was hand @-@ picked by Billy Wilder to play a hard @-@ driving Coca @-@ Cola executive in the film *One , Two , Three* . Cagney had concerns with the script , remembering back 23 years to *Boy Meets Girl* , in which scenes were reshot to try to make them funnier by speeding up the pacing , with the opposite effect . Cagney received assurances from Wilder that the script was balanced . Filming did not go well , though , with one scene requiring 50 takes , something to which Cagney was unaccustomed . In fact , it was one of the worst experiences of his long career . For the first time , Cagney considered walking out of a film . He felt he had worked too many years inside studios , and combined with a visit to Dachau concentration camp during filming , he decided that he had had enough , and retired afterward . One of the few positive aspects was his friendship with Pamela Tiffin , to whom he gave acting guidance , including the secret that he had learned over his career : " You walk in , plant yourself squarely on both feet , look the other fella in the eye , and tell the truth . "

= = = 1961 ? 86 : Later years and retirement = = =

Cagney remained in retirement for 20 years , conjuring up images of Jack L. Warner every time he was tempted to return , which soon dispelled the notion . After he had turned down an offer to play Alfred Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* , he found it easier to rebuff others , including a part in *The Godfather Part II* . He made few public appearances , preferring to spend winters in Los Angeles ,

and summers either at his Martha 's Vineyard farm or at Verney Farms in New York . When in New York , Billie Vernon and he held numerous parties at the Silver Horn restaurant , where they got to know Marge Zimmermann , the proprietress .

Cagney was diagnosed with glaucoma and began taking eye drops , but continued to have vision problems . On Zimmermann 's recommendation , he visited a different doctor , who determined that glaucoma had been a misdiagnosis , and that Cagney was actually diabetic . Zimmermann then took it upon herself to look after Cagney , preparing his meals to reduce his blood triglycerides , which had reached alarming levels . Such was her success that , by the time Cagney made a rare public appearance at his American Film Institute Lifetime Achievement award ceremony in 1974 , he had lost 20 pounds (9 @. @ 1 kg) and his vision had improved . Charlton Heston opened the ceremony , and Frank Sinatra introduced Cagney . So many Hollywood stars attended ? said to be more than for any event in history ? that one columnist wrote at the time that a bomb in the dining room would have ended the movie industry . In his acceptance speech , Cagney lightly chastised the impressionist Frank Gorshin , saying , " Oh , Frankie , just in passing , I never said ' MMMMMmmmm , you dirty rat ! ' What I actually did say was ' Judy , Judy , Judy ! ' " ? a joking reference to a similar misquotation attributed to Cary Grant .

While at Coldwater Canyon in 1977 , Cagney had a minor stroke . After two weeks in the hospital , Zimmermann became his full @-@ time caregiver , traveling with Billie Vernon and him wherever they went . After the stroke , Cagney was no longer able to undertake many of his favorite pastimes , including horseback riding and dancing , and as he became more depressed , he even gave up painting . Encouraged by his wife and Zimmermann , Cagney accepted an offer from the director Milo? Forman to star in a small but pivotal role in the film Ragtime (1981) .

This film was shot mainly at Shepperton Studios in Surrey , England , and on his arrival at Southampton aboard the Queen Elizabeth 2 , Cagney was mobbed by hundreds of fans . Cunard Line officials , who were responsible for the security at the dock , said they had never seen anything like it , although they had experienced past visits by Marlon Brando and Robert Redford .

Despite the fact that Ragtime was his first film in 20 years , Cagney was immediately at ease : Flubbed lines and miscues were committed by his co @-@ stars , often simply through sheer awe . Howard Rollins , who received a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nomination for his performance , said , " I was frightened to meet Mr. Cagney . I asked him how to die in front of the camera . He said ' Just die ! ' It worked . Who would know more about dying than him ? " Cagney also repeated the advice he had given to Pamela Tiffin , Joan Leslie , and Lemmon . As filming progressed , Cagney 's sciatica worsened , but he finished the nine @-@ week filming , and reportedly stayed on the set after completing his scenes to help the other actors with their dialogue .

Cagney 's frequent co @-@ star , Pat O 'Brien , appeared with him on the British chat show Parkinson in the early 1980s and they both made a surprise appearance at the Queen Mother 's command birthday performance at the London Palladium in 1980 . His appearance on stage prompted the Queen Mother to rise to her feet , the only time she did so during the whole show , and she later broke protocol to go backstage to speak with Cagney directly .

Cagney made a rare TV appearance in the lead role of the movie Terrible Joe Moran in 1984 . This was his last role . Cagney 's health was fragile and more strokes had confined him to a wheelchair , but the producers worked his real @-@ life mobility problem into the story . They also decided to dub his impaired speech , using the impersonator Rich Little . The film made use of fight clips from Cagney 's boxing movie Winner Take All (1932) , despite the fact that the TV movie is about an entirely different character .

= = Personal life = =

In 1920 , Cagney was a member of the chorus for the show Pitter Patter , where he met Frances Willard " Billie " Vernon . They married on September 28 , 1922 , and the marriage lasted until his death in 1986 . Frances Cagney died in 1994 . In 1941 , they adopted a son whom they named James Cagney , Jr . , and later a daughter , Cathleen " Casey " Cagney . Cagney was a very private man , and while he was very willing to give the press opportunities for photographs , he generally

spent his time out of the public eye .

Cagney 's son married Jill Lisbeth Inness in 1962 . The couple had two children , James III and Cindy . Cagney Jr. died from a heart attack on January 27 , 1984 in Washington , DC , two years before his father 's death . He had become estranged from his father and had not seen or talked to him since 1982 .

Cagney 's daughter Cathleen married Jack W. Thomas in 1962 . She , too , was estranged from her father during the final years of his life . She died on August 11 , 2004 .

As a young man , Cagney became interested in farming ? sparked by a soil conservation lecture he had attended ? to the extent that during his first walkout from Warner Bros. , he helped to found a 100 @-@ acre (0 @.@ 40 km2) farm in Martha 's Vineyard . Cagney loved that no concrete roads surrounded the property , only dirt tracks . The house was rather run @-@ down and ramshackle , and Billie was initially reluctant to move in , but soon came to love the place , as well . After being inundated by movie fans , Cagney sent out a rumor that he had hired a gunman for security . The ruse proved so successful that when Spencer Tracy came to visit , his taxi driver refused to drive up to the house , saying , " I hear they shoot ! " Tracy had to go the rest of the way on foot .

In 1955 , having shot three films , Cagney bought a 120 @-@ acre (0 @.@ 49 km2) farm in Stanfordville , Dutchess County , New York , for \$ 100 @,@ 000 . Cagney named it Verney Farm , taking the first syllable from Billie 's maiden name and the second from his own surname . He turned it into a working farm , selling some of the dairy cattle and replacing them with beef cattle . He expanded it over the years to 750 acres (3 @.@ 0 km2) . Such was Cagney 's enthusiasm for agriculture and farming that his diligence and efforts were rewarded by an honorary degree from Florida 's Rollins College . Rather than just " turning up with Ava Gardner on my arm " to accept his honorary degree , Cagney turned the tables upon the college 's faculty by writing and submitting a paper on soil conservation .

Cagney , born in 1899 (prior to widespread use of automobiles) loved horses from childhood . As a child , he often sat on the horses of local deliverymen , and rode in horse @-@ drawn streetcars with his mother . As an adult , well after horses were replaced by automobiles as the primary mode of transportation , Cagney raised horses on his farms , specializing in Morgans , a breed of which he was particularly fond .

Cagney was a keen sailor and owned boats harbored on both US coasts , His joy in sailing , however , did not protect him from occasional seasickness ? becoming ill , sometimes , on a calm day while weathering rougher , heavier seas at other times . Cagney greatly enjoyed painting , and claimed in his autobiography that he might have been happier , if somewhat poorer , as a painter than a movie star . The renowned painter Sergei Bongart taught Cagney in his later life and owned two of Cagney 's works . Cagney often gave away his work , but refused to sell his paintings , considering himself an amateur . He signed and sold only one painting , purchased by Johnny Carson to benefit a charity .

= = = Political views = = =

In his autobiography , Cagney said that as a young man , he had no political views , since he was more concerned with where the next meal was coming from . However , the emerging labor movement of the 1920s and 1930s soon forced him to take sides . The first version of the National Labor Relations Act was passed in 1935 and growing tensions between labor and management fueled the movement . Fanzines in the 1930s , however , described his politics as " radical " . This somewhat exaggerated view was enhanced by his public contractual wranglings with Warner Bros. at the time , his joining of the Screen Actors Guild in 1933 , and his involvement in the revolt against the so @-@ called " Merriam tax " . The " Merriam tax " was an underhanded method of funneling studio funds to politicians ; during the 1934 Californian gubernatorial campaign , the studio executives would ' tax ' their actors , automatically taking a day 's pay from their biggest @-@ earners , ultimately sending nearly half a million dollars to the gubernatorial campaign of Frank Merriam . Cagney (as well as Jean Harlow) publicly refused to pay and Cagney even threatened that , if the studios took a day 's pay for Merriam 's campaign , he would give a week 's pay to Upton

Sinclair , Merriam 's opponent in the race .

He supported political activist and labor leader Thomas Mooney 's defense fund , but was repelled by the behavior of some of Mooney 's supporters at a rally . Around the same time , he gave money for a Spanish Republican Army ambulance during the Spanish Civil War , which he put down to being " a soft touch " . This donation enhanced his liberal reputation . He also became involved in a " liberal group ... with a leftist slant , " along with Ronald Reagan . However , when Reagan and he saw the direction the group was heading , they resigned on the same night .

Cagney was accused of being a communist sympathizer in 1934 , and again in 1940 . The accusation in 1934 stemmed from a letter police found from a local Communist official that alleged that Cagney would bring other Hollywood stars to meetings . Cagney denied this , and Lincoln Steffens , husband of the letter 's writer , backed up this denial , asserting that the accusation stemmed solely from Cagney 's donation to striking cotton workers in the San Joaquin Valley . William Cagney claimed this donation was the root of the charges in 1940 . Cagney was cleared by U.S. Representative Martin Dies , Jr . , on the House Un @-@ American Activities Committee .

Cagney became president of the Screen Actors Guild in 1942 for a two @-@ year term . He took a role in the Guild 's fight against the Mafia , which had begun to take an active interest in the movie industry . His wife , Billie Vernon , once received a phone call telling her that Cagney was dead . Cagney alleged that , having failed to scare off the Guild and him , they sent a hitman to kill him by dropping a heavy light onto his head . Upon hearing of the rumor of a hit , George Raft made a call , and the hit was supposedly canceled .

During World War II , Cagney raised money for war bonds by taking part in racing exhibitions at the Roosevelt Raceway and selling seats for the premiere of Yankee Doodle Dandy . He also let the Army practice maneuvers at his Martha 's Vineyard farm .

After the war , Cagney 's politics started to change . He had worked on Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt 's presidential campaigns , including the 1940 presidential election against Wendell Willkie . However , by the time of the 1948 election , he had become disillusioned with Harry S. Truman , and voted for Thomas E. Dewey , his first non @-@ Democratic vote . By 1980 , Cagney was contributing financially to the Republican Party , supporting his friend Ronald Reagan 's bid for the presidency in the 1980 election . As he got older , he became more and more conservative , referring to himself in his autobiography as " arch @-@ conservative . " He regarded his move away from liberal politics as " ... a totally natural reaction once I began to see undisciplined elements in our country stimulating a breakdown of our system ... Those functionless creatures , the hippies ... just didn 't appear out of a vacuum . "

= = Death = =

Cagney died at his Dutchess County farm in Stanfordville , New York , on Easter Sunday 1986 , of a heart attack . He was 86 years old . A funeral Mass was held at Manhattan 's St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church . The eulogy at the funeral was given by his close friend , who was also the President of the United States at the time , Ronald Reagan . His pallbearers included the boxer Floyd Patterson , the dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov (who had hoped to play Cagney on Broadway) , actor Ralph Bellamy , and the director Milo? Forman . Governor Mario M. Cuomo and Mayor Edward I. Koch were also in attendance at the service .

Cagney was interred in a crypt in the Garden Mausoleum at Cemetery of the Gate of Heaven in Hawthorne , New York .

= = Honors and legacy = =

In 1974 , Cagney received the American Film Institute 's Life Achievement Award . Charlton Heston , in announcing that Cagney was to be honored , called him " ... one of the most significant figures of a generation when American film was dominant , Cagney , that most American of actors , somehow communicated eloquently to audiences all over the world ... and to actors as well . "

He received the Kennedy Center Honors in 1980 . In 1984 , Ronald Reagan awarded him the

Presidential Medal of Freedom .

In 1999 , the U.S. Postal Service issued a 33 ¢ stamp honoring Cagney .

Cagney was among the most favored actors for the director Stanley Kubrick and the actor Marlon Brando , and was considered by Orson Welles to be " ... maybe the greatest actor to ever appear in front of a camera . " Warner Bros. arranged private screenings of Cagney films for Winston Churchill .

On May 19 , 2015 , a brand new musical celebrating Cagney , and dramatizing his relationship with Warner Bros. , opened off Broadway in New York City at the York Theatre .

== Filmography ==

Source : " James Cagney " . IMDb . Retrieved October 4 , 2013 .

== Television ==

What 's My Line 1960 - Secret Guest

The Ballad of Smokey the Bear (1966) ? voice , narrator

Terrible Joe Moran (1984)

== Radio appearances ==