

MAY 2014
MALGORZATA ROZIEWSKA
ENGLISH B
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Title

James Dean's rebellion- why his performances in 'Rebel without a cause' and 'East of Eden' were so compelling for the American youth of the 50s?

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Abstract

This essay investigates the question: why James Dean's performances in 'East of Eden' and 'Rebel Without a Cause' were so compelling for the American youth of the 50s? The essay begins by introducing the historical and cultural background of the mid-century America and outlining the certain social contradictions and problems resulting from the actual incoherency of the containment narrative of the 1950s. This allowed for further examination of the nature of the youth culture of this decade in relation to the phenomenon of containment in order to understand the role of youth idols and the process of their formation. The proceeding subsection discusses the genre of the 1950s youth culture films, which illuminates the interactions between this movie genre and the youth culture. It aids the understanding how the stars of the silver screen impacted on the young audience. The second section of the essay uses previously examined facts and phenomena in specific, in-depth study of the reason for James Dean's influence on the youth via his performances in 'East of Eden' and 'Rebel Without a Cause'. To this end, discussed are: James Dean's private and onscreen stance, his partial similarity to Marlon Brando and the character and message of his two investigated movies as well as the moment of their release. The reached conclusion in the essay acknowledges the lack of a precise answer to the research question due to the complexity of the mechanism of the formation of the James Dean's icon revealed throughout the investigation. The conclusion indicates, that to the rise of James Dean's as an idol of the American youth of the 50s contributed a combination of different factors and circumstances, whose distinct relative importance is hard to evaluate.