

t still the rebel

Almost overnight adolescence was invented and deified almost in the same breath. While previous generations had jumped from childhood to the trials and tribulations of adulthood in one quick step, the 50s produced a generation of parents with the financial wherewithal to afford their children adult freedoms without having them hold down adult responsibilities like employment.

Freed from the responsibilities of the workplace and excessive worry, born in a lionish and wealthy America, these children of materialism were reminded daily of how good they had it (unlike how bad their parents had it at their ages in the depression). Unfortunately America's youth was still miserable.

The central tenant of the American dream — that hard work, success and money will liberate you from all sadness — turned out to be a big sham. Misery wasn't wiped away by work and money. If anything, America discovered that misery was inherent to the human condition.

Allen Wheelis in his novel *The Desert* describes misery as an absolute in man's life, something that is always there, no matter who you are or how well off you are. Viktor Frankl equated the behaviour of misery to that of a gas. Misery, is like a gas in that regardless of its quantity it will expand and fill whatever space there was in the human soul.

America's teenagers discovered that misery was inherent to the human condition, but also rather pointless.

That's where James Dean comes in. Dean symbolized that unease and pain in America's teenagers. He became the leader of an entire generation of sufferers without cause. Or as John Howlett, a Dean biographer, puts it: "The identification was never as traditional with a film star; the fantasy was not 'how nice to be like that'; rather it was the conviction, 'that is how I am'."

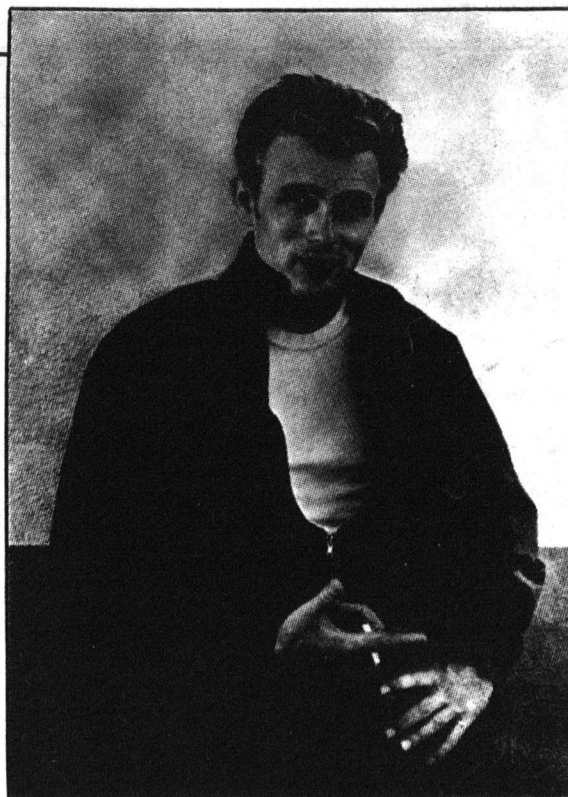
Dean embodied the universal and pointless dissatisfaction with life at the pit of everyone's soul. A small part of everybody would have liked to live and even die like Dean. In a sense, through his life and tragic death Dean became some sacrificial offering on a national scale: his death was the price to allow an entire generation to hang on.

Dean the man, Dean the movie star, and even the movies of Dean pale in the significance of the phenomenon of James Dean.

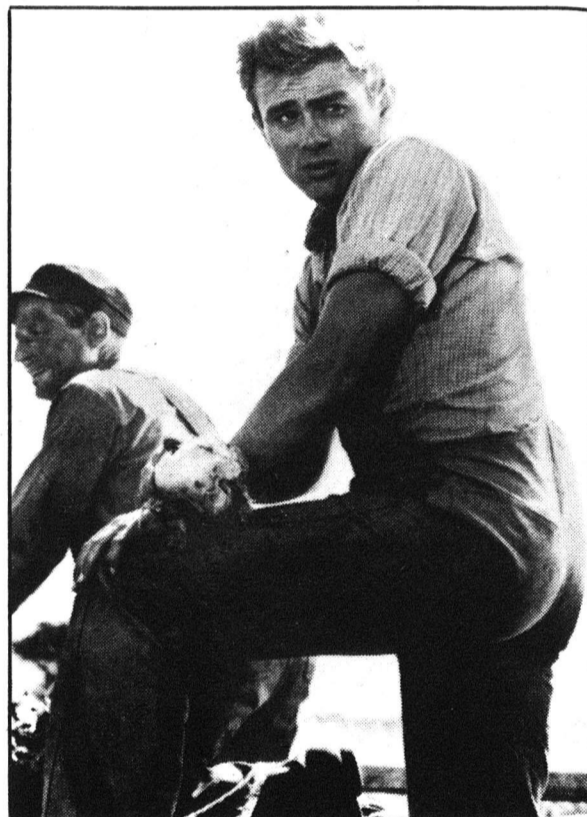
Dean by the virtue of being more potential than actual, having left more unsaid than vocalized, allowed an America in search of meaning, in search of self-identification a life and legend to create as each individual fan saw fit. Dean died for America's sins and is reborn in the dreams and memories of the million of fans that his example has given new hope to.

Ambiguity is inevitable, initiated by the real contradictions in Dean's personality, helped on its way by the stories, exaggerated, apocryphal, sensationalised, that gather round the myth.

Bill Bast's mother once spent a whole day alone with Dean in the Santa Monica penthouse he was sharing with her son. When Bast returned home in the evening he found his mother in tears and close to hysteria. Dean in the middle of some mood or tantrum, had not said a word all day. "It was like being locked up with a dead man," she said.



Striking a defiant pose in *Rebel Without a Cause*.



Dean as the concerned son in *East of Eden*.

Elia Kazan, director of *East of Eden*, had never liked Dean from the days he had first known him at the Actors Studio, and had always compared him unfavorably with Brando. 'Dean was a cripple... inside. He was not like Brando. People compared them, but there was no similarity. He was a far, far sicker kid, and Brando's not sick, he's just troubled.'

"James Dean was now untouchable and death enclosed the image in grisly necrolatry."

George Stevens later described the force of Dean's motivation: "He was a disturbed boy tremendously dedicated to some intangible beacon of his own, and neither he nor anyone else might ever know what it was."

Jimmy became subject to more frequent periods of depression and would slip off into a silent mood at least once each day... If I had thought it difficult to communicate with him at other times in the past, I had never known such a lack of communication as existed during his fits of depression... He would sit in his room, sit there and stare into space for hours. I made several attempts to get through to him, but rarely got more than a grunt or a distant stare for a response.



James Dean reclines on the set of *Giant*