

ROCK HUDSON

AWARD-WINNING ACTOR

b. November 17, 1925

d. October 2, 1985

*"I can at least know my misfortune
has had some positive worth."*

Rock Hudson was an award-winning actor of Hollywood's Golden Age. A handsome leading man who appeared in nearly 70 films, he became the face of the early AIDS epidemic at a time when the virus and its victims were demonized. In coming out with his diagnosis—and his homosexuality—he helped raise public awareness and humanize the disease.

Born Leroy Harold Scherer Jr. in Winnetka, Illinois, Hudson served as an aircraft mechanic in the Navy during World War II. After his discharge, he moved to Hollywood to pursue an acting career. In 1947 a talent scout took him on as his protégé, crafting the stage name "Rock Hudson." Despite Hudson's lack of experience, he landed a bit part in the 1948 feature film "Fire Squadron."

**His decision to go
public about his AIDS
diagnosis catalyzed
public awareness of
the disease.**

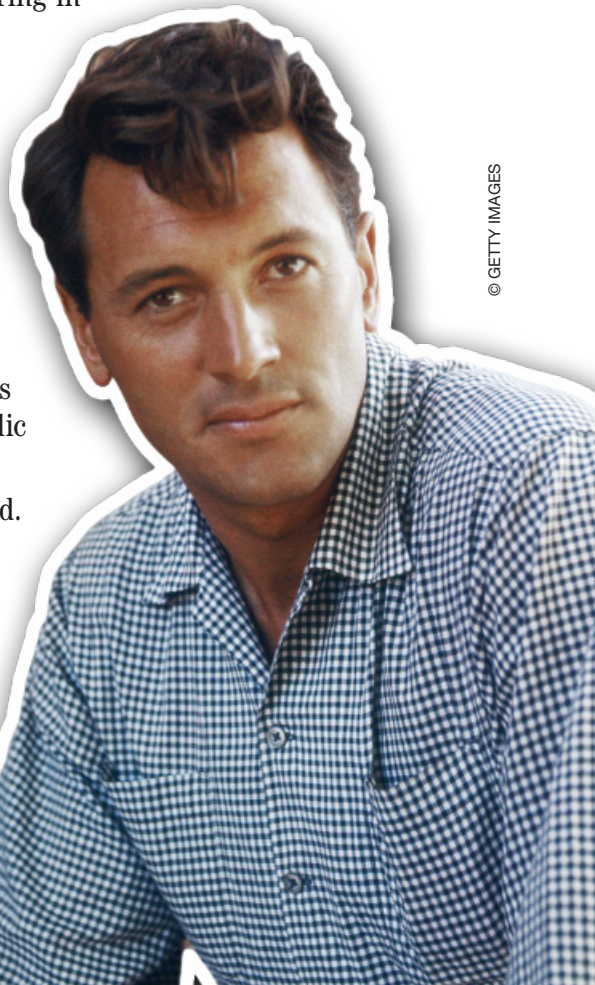
Hudson played minor roles in a number of films before he scored the lead in "Magnificent Obsession" (1954). The film established Hudson as a star and his career skyrocketed. He made five more movies in two years, before appearing in the critically acclaimed "Giant" (1956), alongside Elizabeth Taylor and James Dean. The performance earned him an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor in a Leading Role.

In 1959 Hudson's career took another positive turn when he was cast opposite Doris Day in the romantic comedy "Pillow Talk." The charismatic actor quickly became a Hollywood heartthrob, starring in two more comedies with Day. The couple's on-screen chemistry made box office magic and ignited a lifelong friendship. In the late 1960s, Hudson turned his talent to television, most notable starring in "McMillan & Wife," a popular police drama that ran through the 1970s.

Despite his public success, Hudson's private life was shrouded in secrecy. Fear of social stigma and professional disaster kept him, and other gay actors of the day, closeted. In 1955, to keep up appearances, Hudson entered a short-lived marriage to Phyllis Gates, arranged by his agent.

Hudson was diagnosed with AIDS in June 1984. In 1985 Doris Day asked him to guest on her television talk-show premiere. He appeared in July for the taping and post-show press conference looking shockingly ill and gaunt. Shortly thereafter, he publicly acknowledged his health status. He was one of the first major celebrities to disclose his homosexuality and his battle with AIDS. The revelation helped catalyze awareness and change public perceptions about the disease.

Hudson died in Beverly Hills just a few days after the program with Day aired. He was 59.



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