Stanwyck, Barbara (1907-1990) Encyclopedia Article

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From her modest beginnings as a Broadway chorus girl named Ruby Stevens, Barbara Stanwyck forged a long and versatile career as one of Hollywood's strongest female stars. Her breakthrough performance occurred in 1930's *Ladies of Leisure,* directed by Frank Capra, who said her emotionally charged acting could "grab your heart and tear it to pieces." In her earliest roles she epitomized the self-sacrificing woman, culminating in her title part in the 1937 woman's picture, *Stella Dallas*. The 1940s transformed her into a sexy, ruthless femme fatale. She played the movies' first woman to murder for no reason nobler than avarice in the 1944 seminal film noir, *Double Indemnity*. Unlike Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, her peers in melodrama, Stanwyck also made an impression as a comedienne in canonical romantic comedies like 1941's *Ball of Fire* and *The Lady Eve*. Her image, onscreen and off, as a tough, independent woman overcoming a hardscrabble childhood is her legacy.

Further Reading:

DiOrio, Al. *Barbara Stanwyck: A Biography.* New York, Coward-McCann, 1983.

Madsen, Axel. *Stanwyck: A Biography.* New York, Harper Collins, 1995.