



Beyond Dead End: The Solo Careers of The Dead End Kids

By Joseph Fusco

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No one exemplifies the angst of the Depression era street kid more than The Dead End Kids. They were the stars of Sidney Kingsley's 1935 play, *Dead End* and reprised their roles in Samuel Goldwyn's 1937 Hollywood film version. The movie defined the theme of slum dramas for the juvenile rebellion films of subsequent decades. The Dead End Kids were Billy Halop, Huntz Hall, Bobby Jordan, Leo Gorcey, Gabriel Dell and Bernard Punsly. The best of their films were the gangster movies where the boys collided with the likes of Humphrey Bogart in *Dead End* and *Crime School*, James Cagney in *Angels with Dirty Faces* and John Garfield in *They Made Me a Criminal*. They bandied about light weights like Ronald Reagan in lackluster efforts like *Hell's Kitchen* and *Angels Wash Their Faces* before being reformed by a military academy in *On Dress Parade*. Their original reign was short lived, not because they ran out of steam but because they had to be toned down because of public criticism. It didn't matter because The Dead End Kids mutated into several splinter groups that starred in various configurations of the original members for the next quarter century, carving out a unique niche in motion picture history. One of the uncharted tributaries of this history is the solo careers of the actors who played the Dead End Kids. There were careers of mixed blessings after the initial stardom and each member faced and dealt with the typecasting dilemma in different ways and various degrees of success. There was plenty of heartbreak and disappointment along a way that started with *Dead End* in 1935 and ended with Dr. Bernard Punsly's death in 2004. *Beyond Dead End: The Solo Careers of The Dead End Kids* chronicles a saga of mixed blessings where each member faced and dealt with the typecasting dilemma in different ways and various degrees of success.

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