



Mr. America: The Tragic History of a Bodybuilding Icon (Terry and Jan Todd Series on Physical Culture and Sports)

By John D. Fair

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For most of the twentieth century, the “Mr. America” image epitomized muscular manhood. From humble beginnings in 1939 at a small gym in Schenectady, New York, the Mr. America Contest became the world’s premier bodybuilding event over the next thirty years. Rooted in ancient Greek virtues of health, fitness, beauty, and athleticism, it showcased some of the finest specimens of American masculinity. Interviewing nearly one hundred major figures in the physical culture movement (including twenty-five Mr. Americas) and incorporating copious printed and manuscript sources, John D. Fair has created the definitive study of this iconic phenomenon.

Revealing the ways in which the contest provided a model of functional and fit manhood, Mr. America captures the event’s path to idealism and its slow descent into obscurity. As the 1960s marked a turbulent transition in American society—from the civil rights movement to the rise of feminism and increasing acceptance of homosexuality—Mr. America changed as well. Exploring the influence of other bodily displays, such as the Mr. Universe and Mr. Olympia contests and the Miss America Pageant, Fair focuses on commercialism, size obsession, and drugs that corrupted the competition’s original intent. Accessible and engaging, Mr. America is a compelling portrayal of the glory days of American muscle.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Mr. America has the potential to be a paradigm-changer . . . bound to become the new text of record on its subject. Gender scholars with interest in masculinities, readers with an interest in popular cultural changes, and those ambitious in the field of bodybuilding and weightlifting can all find plenty of connections within this new work." (Charles Kupfer, Associate Professor of American Studies and History, Penn State Harrisburg)

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About the Author

JOHN D. FAIR has authored six previous books, including *Muscle Town USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell*. He is a retired history professor (Auburn University, Montgomery, and Georgia College & State University) and has competed in nearly eighty weightlifting/powerlifting meets, served on the national AAU weightlifting committee, and judged many physique competitions, including the 1973 Mr. America Contest. He is currently Adjunct Professor of Kinesiology and Health Education at the University of Texas at Austin's Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports.

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