



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

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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