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Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era

Susan Jeffords

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"An important and original book with dazzling insights . . . it challenges some widely held views of both the political and cinematic components of contemporary America, and it should certainly evoke a goodly share of indignation as well as admiration."--H. Bruce Franklin, author of MIA or Mythmaking in America "Hard Bodies is a real page-turner in which Susan Jeffords reveals how in the 1980s Ronald Reagan, Rambo, and Robocop came together at our own fitness clubs in a way that transformed crucial numbers of movie-going, Nautilus-devoted American white men into anti-Communist presidential voters. This serious book is sure to change how we make sense of Hollywood's gendered maintenance of the Cold War."--Cynthia Enloe, author of The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War Hard Bodies looks at some of the most popular films of the Reagan era and examines how the characters, themes, and stories presented in them often helped to reinforce and disseminate the policies, programs, and beliefs of the "Reagan Revolution." In particular, because Ronald Reagan was himself most often portrayed in terms that emphasized his strength, toughness, and assertiveness, one of the key images of the Reagan era was that of masculinity itself. But the Reagan era also promoted a concept of the nation as gendered, strong, tough, and assertive, like the President who seemed to epitomize the United States in its confrontation with the "evil" Soviet empire, the Sandinista government, or the drug-trading cartels. Action-adventure films of the 1980s accentuated these qualities, not only as foreign policy methods but also as domestic agendas, putting forward the American "hard body" as the solution to the nation's foreign and domestic failings. Through her illuminating and detailed analyses of both the Reagan presidency and many blockbuster movies, Susan Jeffords provides a scenario within which the successes of the New Right and the Reagan presidency can begin to be understood. Rambo, Lethal Weapon, Die Hard, Robocop, Back to the Future, Star Wars, the Indiana Jones series, Mississippi Burning, Rain Man, Batman, and Unforgiven are among the films she discusses. Susan Jeffords is a professor of English and director of Women's Studies at the University of Washington. She is the author of The Remasculization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War, and co-editor of Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War (Rutgers University Press).

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