



John Wayne and Ideology

By Larry A. Van Meter

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John Wayne and Ideology is an examination of John Wayne's legacy as a political force. It is no exaggeration to say that, playing the lead in over 150 movies, he is one of the most popular actors in the history of cinema. This book argues that his enduring popularity is historically mediated. Certainly an A-list actor before and during World War II, John Wayne nevertheless did not become an icon until after the war, when, because of the war and emerging calls for women's and minorities' rights, white masculinity anxieties spiked. The American political reaction to this new world was a radical shift to the right, with John Wayne and Ronald Reagan embodying that change. The racist, misogynous, and homophobic films of John Wayne, still hugely popular, bear witness to that right turn. Moreover, that legacy continues, with generations of "Johns Wayne"-such as, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and post-9/11 superheroes-desperately trying to recenter white American masculinity.

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