



Howard Fast: A Critical Companion (Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers)

Andrew F. Macdonald

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Howard Fast, one of the most prolific American writers of the 20th century, has enjoyed wide popularity for his writing and suffered from great notoriety for his politics, but has never been given full credit for his contribution to the essential tales of American culture, the American Revolution, and immigrant acculturation. Although his novels have sold close to eighty million copies, this is the first book-length critical study of his work. In addition to an overview of his fiction, it offers close, critical readings of his historical novels of the American Revolution, *Citizen Tom Paine*, *April Morning*, and his most recent, *Seven Days in June*, his novels about slavery, *Freedom Road* and *Spartacus*, and his popular series about the American experience, *The Immigrants*. A biographical chapter is partly based on an extensive interview granted by Fast exclusively for this book. A comprehensive bibliography completes the work.

This critical study begins with a biographical chapter that links life and works, showing how Fast transmuted his experience into fiction. Macdonald asserts that for all Fast's notoriety as a Communist in the 1940s and 1950s, his works show him to be deeply committed to the principles that inspired the American Revolution. A chapter on literary background discusses all of Fast's major works and most of his minor ones, placing the historical novels into literary context and the other works into their genre traditions. The remaining six chapters focus on his most important individual novels. Each novel is analyzed for plot structure, characterization, and thematic elements. In addition, Macdonald defines and applies alternative critical perspectives from which to read each novel. A genealogy table for *The Immigrants* series, and a complete, up-to-date bibliography of all of Fast's nearly one hundred published works, as well as selected reviews and background reading, make this study invaluable for research and critical understanding. This study of Fast's classic works of historical fiction will aid the student and support the interdisciplinary American history/literature curriculum.

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