



The Myth of the American Superhero

By Robert Jewett, John Shelton Lawrence

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From the Superman of comic books to Hollywood's big-screen action stars, Americans have long enjoyed a love affair with the superhero. In this engaging volume John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett explore the historical and spiritual roots of the superhero myth and its deleterious effect on Americas democratic vision. Arguing that the superhero is the antidemocratic counterpart of the classical monomyth described by Joseph Campbell, the authors show that the American version of the monomyth derives from tales of redemption. In settings where institutions and elected leaders always fail, the American monomyth offers heroes who combine elements of the selfless servant with the lone, zealous crusader who destroys evil. Taking the law into their own hands, these unelected figures assume total power to rid the community of its enemies, thus comprising a distinctively American form of pop fascism. Drawing widely from books, films, TV programs, video games, and places of superhero worship on the World Wide Web, the authors trace the development of the American superhero during the twentieth century and expose the mythic patterns behind the most successful elements of pop culture. Lawrence and Jewett challenge readers to reconsider the relationship of this myth to traditional religious and social values, and they show how, ultimately, these antidemocratic narratives gain the spiritual loyalties of their audiences, in the process inviting them to join in crusades against evil. Finally, the authors pose this provocative question: Can we take a holiday from democracy in our lives of fantasy and entertainment while preserving our commitment to democratic institutions and waysof life?

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

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Jeremy Smith:

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Ruth Nicholson:

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Jon Pittenger:

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