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To Peter, the little fan who continues to instruct me

J. Richard Stevens is an associate professor in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His research delves into the intersection of ideological formation and media message dissemination. This work comprises studies on how cultural messages are formed and passed through popular culture, how technology infrastructure Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence (Television and Popular Culture) affects the delivery of media messages, how communication technology policy is developed, and how media and technology platforms are changing Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence (Television and Popular Culture) American public discourse.

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Preface

For some reason, whenever an author writes a book analyzing an aspect of popular Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence (Television and Popular Culture) culture, he or she inevitably precedes the work in question with an introduction that offers the reader a form of apology.

I'm not sure if this apology is for the benefit of the author or the reader. There exist certain stigmas around the consumption of popular culture that marginalize its study within the confines of academic inquiry. And yet how members of our culture play can be every bit as informative as how we work or what we create.¹

Popular culture has long existed as a core component of Western societies. In his justification for the study of popular culture, John Storey links the emergence of European nationalisms to the emergence of popular culture.² Popular culture texts do not simply reflect the events of history; they typically create conformity Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence (Television and Popular Culture) while simultaneously depoliticizing a society's working class. At its heart, the struggle over popular culture is a struggle over meaning, a renegotiation of the significance of events or of the power of ideology in the public world. Because the superheroic version of the American monomyth (comprehensively discussed in [chapter 2](#)) emerged within a mass-media context, scholars have a tremendous opportunity to dissect its origins. By definition, mass culture reduces more complex ideology into simplistic themes and patterns for easier consumption by the working class.³

I came to this particular inquiry in a gradual way. As a young man, I had read Marvel comic

books (as well as the occasional DC Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence (Television and Popular Culture) Comics title), and perhaps the largest proportion of what I read was *Captain America*. I cannot recall precisely what originally brought me to seek out the exploits of the star-spangled avenger, but I remember even as a youth struggling to reconcile the Captain America of that contemporary age (the 1980s) with the Cap I found in back-issue copies I picked Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence (Television and Popular Culture) up from bargain bins and the long boxes in comic book stores. The Captain America of the 1980s experienced very different adventures from the Captain America Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence (Television and Popular Culture) of the 1960s and 1970s. "My" Cap dealt with much more individualized problems, whereas the back issues I read seemed to indicate a broader struggle against social problems, problems about which I was largely ignorant and less than enthused to read about between the covers of a comic book.

To my embarrassment, I remember looking at those past issues, published a few years before I was born, and thinking that because they engaged social issues such as race relations and sexism, they were somehow the antithesis of entertainment, within which my youthful mind considered education and advocacy inappropriate. But read them I did, and I confess those stories eventually did have some influence on my developing worldview. I did not, as a young man, think that racism was a contemporary problem. To my naïve mind, racism belonged in the history books under subtitles such as "American Slavery," "The American Civil War," and "The Emancipation Proclamation." I had a few African American friends, but I did not perceive any bias in myself or in my community against members of their race.

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