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Publics And Counterpublics



Synopsis

Most of the people around us belong to our world not directly, as kin or comrades, but as strangers. How do we recognize them as members of our world? We are related to them as transient participants in common publics. Indeed, most of us would find it nearly impossible to imagine a social world without publics. In the eight essays in this book, Michael Warner addresses the question: What is a public? According to Warner, the idea of a public is one of the central fictions of modern life. Publics have powerful implications for how our social world takes shape, and much of modern life involves struggles over the nature of publics and their interrelations. The idea of a public contains ambiguities, even contradictions. As it is extended to new contexts, politics, and media, its meaning changes in ways that can be difficult to uncover. Combining historical analysis, theoretical reflection, and extensive case studies, Warner shows how the idea of a public can reframe our understanding of contemporary literary works and politics and of our social world in general. In particular, he applies the idea of a public to the junction of two intellectual traditions: public-sphere theory and queer theory.

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Customer Reviews

"With Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*, that growing discourse on what constitutes a public (and counterpublic) takes a giant step forward in a provocative collection of eight thematically linked essays that draw upon the author's wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary knowledge." Chuck Berg Magill's Literary Annual

Michael Warner is Professor of English at Rutgers University. He is the author of *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* and *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*.

I read this book for a doctoral reading group as a follow up to Habermas. The best I can say about it is that you feel pretty damn pretentious reading it on the subway, in a way that reading a more coherent or important or cogent or worthwhile analysis doesn't make you feel. There are no fully-realized definitions from which the author derives his claims - rather, a series of bewildering though disappointingly pedestrian claims follow one after the next in a disjointed and purposeless chain. The lack of scholarly rigor is also rather glaring. The second star in my rating is granted because I feel it unjust to single out Warner for opprobrium; this study is no worse than countless others published every year.

This book is an excellent piece of queer theory, as well as very useful for those worrying about the relationships between texts, publics, crowds, and peoples.

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Good book. Warner's reflections on the public(S) is helpful and enlightening, both for media students but also relevant across disciplines. The variety of the essay topics, however, disables readers to be interested in the whole book in a uniform way.

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