



Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Glenn Hendler

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In this book, Glenn Hendler explores what he calls the "logic of sympathy" in novels by Walt Whitman, Louisa May Alcott, T. S. Arthur, Martin Delany, Horatio Alger, Fanny Fern, Nathaniel Parker Willis, Henry James, Mark Twain, and William Dean Howells. For these nineteenth-century writers, he argues, sympathetic identification was not strictly an individual, feminizing, and private feeling but the quintessentially public sentiment--a transformative emotion with the power to shape social institutions and political movements.

Uniting current scholarship on gender in nineteenth-century American culture with historical and theoretical debates on the definition of the public sphere in the period, Hendler shows how novels taught diverse readers to "feel right," to experience their identities as male or female, black or white, middle or working class, through a sentimental, emotionally based structure of feeling. He links novels with such wide-ranging cultural and political discourses as the temperance movement, feminism, and black nationalism. *Public Sentiments* demonstrates that, whether published for commercial reasons or for higher moral and aesthetic purposes, the nineteenth-century American novel was conceived of as a public instrument designed to play in a sentimental key.

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