



Object Lessons (Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies)

By Robyn Wiegman

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No concept has been more central to the emergence and evolution of identity studies than social justice. In historical and theoretical accounts, it crystallizes the progressive politics that have shaped the academic study of race, gender, and sexuality. Yet few scholars have deliberated directly on the political agency that notions of justice confer on critical practice. In *Object Lessons*, Robyn Wiegman contemplates this lack of attention, offering the first sustained inquiry into the political desire that galvanizes identity fields. In each chapter, she examines a key debate by considering the political aspirations that shape it. Addressing Women's Studies, she traces the ways that "gender" promises to overcome the exclusions of "women." Turning to Ethnic Studies, she examines the deconstruction of "whiteness" as an antiracist methodology. As she explores American Studies, she links internationalization to the broader quest for noncomplicity in contemporary criticism. Her analysis of Queer Studies demonstrates how the commitment to antinormativity normalizes the field. In the penultimate chapter, Wiegman addresses intersectionality as the most coveted theoretical approach to political resolution in all of these fields.

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

"Wiegman is a brilliant thinker and her text . . . is a thoughtful meditation on the narratives that work to sustain the aspirational hopes of disciplines emerging out of left critique."-- Elizabeth Groeneveld, *Reviews in Cultural Theory*

"This brilliant, commodious book gives us a name for that fast-moving conceptual traffic arrayed across the academic galaxy from the 1970s to the present; as a strategy for naming, *Object Lessons* brings about 'identity knowledges' as a rethought object of desire and destination, its political commitments pursued to the bone, in the immediacy of its institutional arrangements. The reader will not want to miss Robyn Wiegman in this quite stunning and masterful outcome."—Hortense Spillers, author of *Black, White, and In Color*

"This book is as incisive in its articulation of the stakes involved in post–Civil Rights academic field formations as it is responsive to the affective investments shaping specific fields' modes of self-governance and self-reinvention. What do we want from identity knowledges—and what do they offer us? In the incongruent spaces opened up by these questions, and against the nonsynchronized discourses marked by political obligations, institutional structures, and methodological ambitions, Robyn Wiegman narrates what she calls object lessons with inimitable intensity, agility, and imagination. If visionary thinking about identity studies is an art, she has given us a brilliant master-class performance."—Rey Chow, author of *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture*

"This is a contentious book, but without contention, knowledges become rigid and fortified. Robyn Wiegman induces us to think more carefully about the ways in which politically committed knowledges make themselves as they make knowledge of their objects of investigation."—Elizabeth Grosz, author of *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*

About the Author

Robyn Wiegman is Professor of Women's Studies and Literature at Duke University. She is the author of *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, editor of *Women's Studies on Its Own*, and coeditor of *The Futures of American Studies*, *Feminism Beside Itself*, and *Who Can Speak: Identity and Critical Authority*.

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