



The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen-Scholars and Civil Engagement (Studies in Rhetoric/Communication)

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The Public Work of Rhetoric offers a timely and dynamic endorsement of rhetoric as a potent communications tool for civic engagement and social change, efforts necessarily inclusive of people inside and outside the academy. In this provocative call to action, editors John M. Ackerman and David J. Coogan, along with seventeen other accomplished contributors, offer case studies and criticism on the rhetorical practices of citizen-scholars pursuing democratic ideals in diverse civic communities--with partnerships across a range of media, institutions, exigencies, and discourses.

Challenging conventional research methodologies and the traditional insularity of higher education, these essays argue that civic engagement as a rhetorical act requires critical attention to our notoriously veiled identity in public life, to our uneasy affiliation with democracy as a public virtue, and to the transcendent powers of discourse and ideology. This can be accomplished, the contributors argue, by building on the compatible traditions of materialist rhetoric and community literacy. The case studies highlight efforts in inner-urban and postindustrial communities where poverty is the overriding concern, in afterschool and extracurricular alternatives that offer new routes to literate achievement, in new media and digital representations of ethnic cultures designed to promote chosen identities, in neighborhoods and scientific laboratories where race is the dominant value, and in the policy borderlands between universities and the communities they serve. Through these accounts, contributors champion the notion that the public work of rhetoric is the tough labor of gaining access and trust, learning the codes and histories of communities, locating the situations in which rhetorical expertise is most effective, and in many cases jointly defining the terms for gauging social change.

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