

Tracing the evolution of the library as a modern institution from the late eighteenth century to the digital era, this book explores the diverse practices by which Americans have shared reading matter for instruction, edification, and pleasure. Writing from a rich variety of perspectives, the contributors raise important questions about the material forms and social shapes of American culture. What is a library? How have libraries fostered communities of readers and influenced the practice of reading in particular communities? How did the development of modern libraries alter the boundaries of individual and social experience, and define new kinds of public culture? To what extent have libraries served as commercial enterprises, as centers of power, and as places of empowerment for African Americans, women, and immigrants? *Institutions of Reading* offers at once a social history of literacy and leisure, an intellectual history of institutional and technological innovations that facilitated the mass distribution and consumption of printed books and periodicals, and a cultural history of the symbolic meanings and practical uses of reading in American life. In addition to the editors, contributors include Elizabeth Amann, Michael Baenen, James Green, Elizabeth McHenry, Barbara Mitchell, Christine Pawley, Janice Radway, James Raven, Karin Roffman, and Roy Rosenzweig.

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