Imagining Equality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture)

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The theme of inequality has often dominated academic criticism, which has been concerned with identifying, analyzing, and demystifying various regimes of power and the illicit hierarchies upon which they are built. Studies of the United States in the nineteenth century have followed this trend in focusing on slavery, women's writing, and working-class activism. Kerry Larson advocates the importance of looking instead at equality as a central theme, viewing it not as an endangered ideal to strive for and protect but as an imagined social reality in its own right, one with far-reaching consequences. In this original study, he reads the literature of the pre-Civil War United States against Tocqueville's theories of equality. Imagining Equality tests these theories in the work of a broad array of authors and genres, both canonical and non-canonical, and in doing so discovers important themes in Stowe, Hawthorne, Douglass and Alcott.

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