Social and political theorists have traced in detail how individuals come to possess gender, sex, and racial identities. This book examines the nature of these identities. Georgia Warnke argues that identities, in general, are interpretations and, as such, have more in common with textual understanding than we commonly acknowledge. A racial, sexed, or gendered understanding of who we and others are is neither exhaustive of the “meanings” we can be said to have, nor uniquely correct. We are neither always, nor only, black or white, men or women, or males or females. Rather, all identities have a restricted scope and can lead to injustices and contradictions when they are employed beyond that scope. In concluding her argument, Warnke considers the legal and policy implications that follow for affirmative action, childbearing leave, the position of gays in the military, and marriage between same-sex partners.

Georgia Warnke is Professor of Philosophy and Associate Dean for Arts and Humanities at the University of California, Riverside.
As the twenty-first century begins, major new political challenges have arisen at the same time as some of the most enduring dilemmas of political association remain unresolved. The collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War reflect a victory for democratic and liberal values, yet in many of the Western countries that nurtured those values there are severe problems of urban decay, class and racial conflict, and failing political legitimacy. Enduring global injustice and inequality seem compounded by environmental problems, disease, the oppression of women, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, and the relentless growth of the world’s population. In such circumstances, the need for creative thinking about the fundamentals of human political association is manifest. This new series in contemporary political theory is needed to foster such systematic normative reflection.

The series proceeds in the belief that the time is ripe for a reassertion of the importance of problem-driven political theory. It is concerned, that is, with works that are motivated by the impulse to understand, think critically about, and address the problems in the world, rather than issues that are thrown up primarily in academic debate. Books in the series may be interdisciplinary in character, ranging over issues conventionally dealt with in philosophy, law, history, and the human sciences. The range of materials and the methods of proceeding should be dictated by the problem at hand, not the conventional debates or disciplinary divisions of academia.

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GEORGIA WARNKE
To the memory of my parents
Paul C. Warnke, 1920–2001, and
Jean R. Warnke, 1923–2003
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My parents were Washington, DC liberals and condemned racism and sexism in all its forms. As we grew up, they expected us to do our part. Like other liberal parents in Washington, they forbade us certain brands of juice and candy, which were associated with the John Birch Society. They also kept us out of certain stores, movie theaters, and the local amusement park, which even in the early 1960s remained segregated. When a nursery school teacher told me I could not be both a mother and a lawyer, my mother said that was the stupidest thing she’d ever heard. When my sister and I failed to show keen enough interest in preparing for our careers immediately after college, my mother sent away for our graduate school applications herself.

Nevertheless, neither of my parents would have been particularly interested in the issues of racial, sex, and gender identity I raise in this book. Nor would they necessarily have thought that trying to understand what these identities are is an important part of overcoming racism and sexism. I dedicate this book to them anyway. I was proud of them, and for the most part they were pleased with me.

I would like to thank the National Humanities Center for the John Medlin Jr. Fellowship it awarded me for the 2004–5 academic year. I would also like to thank the staff of the Center and the members of my “class” of fellows, especially Wendy Allanbrook, Tom Cogswell, Betsy Dain, Deb Harkness, Greg Mitman, Kent Mulliken, Kevin Ohi, Cara Robertson, and Pete Sigal. I very much appreciate the support of Ian Shapiro as well as the members of the Department of Philosophy at the University of California, Riverside and of the past and present graduate students in the Motley Crew.
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My sons and the other members of my family know what they mean to me.
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