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*The Most American Thing in America: Circuit Chatauqua as
Performance* (review)

Henry Bial

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lives. For these very reasons, Augst ought to have considered more carefully feminine sentimentalism in both its literary forms and women's private practices. Nineteenth-century African-American writers, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, as well as Native American writers, like John Rollin Ridge and Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, also understood the appeal of sentimentalism and adapted it to their own political, social, and literary purposes. Although Augst cannot be expected to take into account all aspects of nineteenth-century sentimentalism, his own comparative approach to popular and material cultures in relation to traditional literature requires some consideration of literacy across gender, class, and ethnic boundaries. For all its virtues, the present study remains too narrowly focused on white, middle-class, masculine practices, most of which were constructed ideologically to exclude other social formations.

The academic study of literature in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century U.S. culture undoubtedly depends significantly on bourgeois masculine values, but the feminine and minority sentimental and other literary forms excluded from the academic curriculum until quite recently were vigorously, in some cases *violently*, repressed. What do these exclusions teach us about the emergence of "American literature" out of middle-class literacy and its "moral economy" in the period? Augst's book does not help us answer this question, but it provokes us to ask it.

University of Southern California

John Carlos Rowe

THE MOST AMERICAN THING IN AMERICA: Circuit Chatauqua as Performance.
By Charlotte M. Canning. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press. 2005.

Before radio, television, and the internet, one mass medium provided rural Americans with a mix of education, entertainment, evangelism, and patriotism that constituted a shared national experience. Called "Chatauquas" in reference to the Methodist institution at Lake Chatauqua in western New York that inspired the movement, these traveling performance companies crisscrossed the United States from roughly 1904 to 1930, playing virtually every town large enough to support a train station. Charlotte M. Canning's lively and thorough book narrates the history of circuit Chatauqua (or, simply, "the circuits," referring to the itinerant nature of the companies), which at its peak in the 1910s and early 1920s played to thousands of towns and millions of Americans each year. Canning, a theatre historian, draws on a broad range of archival sources to paint a vivid picture of the once ubiquitous circuits whose trademark brown canvas tents and wood platform stages showcased "talent" of all sorts, from Susan B. Anthony to Swiss bell ringers, from William Jennings Bryan to literature professors, from Mark Twain to bowdlerized productions of Shakespeare's plays. Over one-hundred illustrations, spaced throughout, help bring the period alive for the reader.

By focusing on the interaction between the Chatauquas and the audiences for whom they performed, Canning demonstrates persuasively that the circuits were a site of complex negotiations of citizenship and national identity. Unlike other popular entertainments of the period (vaudeville, burlesque, circus) Chatauqua spoke directly to the desire of many Americans to preserve a rural, agricultural way of life. "In the Chatauqua tent," writes Canning, "small-town America was participating in the performance of small-town America. [. . .] By performing the America they wanted to exist, Chatauqua and its communities helped to make that America exist, even if only for the duration of the performance" (5).

The book takes its organizing structure from its subject matter. After a brief but thorough Introduction ("Remembering the Platform"), each of five chapters brings a different

aspect of Canning's argument to the stage. Chapter 1 ("America on the Platform") explores how the Chatauqua circuits self-consciously allied themselves to a national mythology. This national mythos, Canning suggests, was dependent on a specifically pastoral concept of community, the parameters of which are discussed in Chapter 2 ("Community on the Platform"). Just as the physical stage stood for and at the center of the overall Chatauqua experience, the pivotal central chapter ("The Platform in the Tent") explores how the circuits were able to reposition the tent, a sign of transience and questionable virtue, as a symbol of permanence and moral uplift. In Chapter 4 ("Performance on the Platform: Oratory"), Canning turns her attention to the forms of performance form most commonly associated with the Chatauqua: the civic lecture and the elocutionary recital. Chapter 5 ("Performance on the Platform: Theater") explores Chatauqua's curious relationship to theatrical performance. Initially conceived as a morally and aesthetically superior alternative to theater, the Chatauqua movement struggled to maintain its anti-theatrical stance in the face of a growing audience desire for dramatic entertainment. A brief Conclusion ("The Palimpsestic Platform"), looks at surviving traces of Chatauqua in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, from the Chatauqua-themed Elvis Presley movie *The Trouble With Girls* (1969) to the neo-Chatauqua performances conceived and supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, state humanities councils (mostly in the great plains), and public and private historical societies.

University of Kansas

Henry Bial

THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT: Rethinking the Civil Rights–Black Power Era.
Edited by Peniel Joseph. New York: Routledge. 2006.

Spike Lee's 1989 film, *Do The Right Thing*, culminates in an eruption of rage and violence. Before the credits begin rolling, the images and words of two great African American leaders appear on the screen. The audience is left to ponder whether the "right thing" is Martin Luther King Jr.'s reproachful "as you promised," or Malcolm X's audacious "by any means necessary."

The idea that these iconic personifications of Civil Rights (CR) and Black Power (BP) epitomize divergent movements is ubiquitous; it has been ingrained in public memory and is presumed by much academic work. This dichotomous splitting of black freedom struggles is precisely what *The Black Power Movement* aims to mend. Each of the essays complicates such simplistic oppositions and challenges the politics that foregrounds the division between a heroic, righteous, nonviolent CR movement, and a deviant, destructive, and politically ineffective BP movement. As the editor Peniel Joseph explains, he intends to undermine the "hegemony" that disassembles "CR and BP as a progressive regression from hope to anger to chaos" (21).

Stokely Carmichael's defiant rallying cry—as he and King continued James Meredith's 1966 "March Against Fear"—has conventionally served as the signpost marking the birth of BP and the death of CR. Joseph offers a different periodization and a more inclusive conception of BP. His elastic "long BP movement" reaches back more than two decades earlier to the ideas of Depression-era radicals. It also stretches forward to current Black Studies scholarship and various incarnations of multiculturalism; and even sideways to encompass parallel movements, such as black feminism, student, labor, and welfare rights activism, and black nationalism "from Newark, NJ, to Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, and beyond" (7). Through this framing, BP comes to represent the entire African American struggle (not CR gone awry), revealing continuities and coherences absent in historiographical strictures that sever activism geographically (north vs. south),