

## Reviews

CARRIE HYDE, *Civic Longing: The Speculative Origins of U.S. Citizenship*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 308. \$45.

Between about 1865 and the Second World War, people around the North Atlantic came to imagine themselves and their attachments by way of certain concepts whose meanings were just taking hold. One infamous example is *sexuality*, the term that taught us to see our erotic desires as expressions of our essential selves. Another, Carrie Hyde argues in *Civic Longing: The Speculative Origins of U.S. Citizenship*, is *citizenship*, the concept that bound our legal rights and obligations to our identities as natural-born or naturalized members of a national community. Where did it come from, and what does it do, this dream of legitimate inclusion? Hyde goes looking for its “speculative origins.”

If we are talking about citizenship in the United States, Hyde proposes, the crystallization of meaning may be dated with precision: “The several revolutions that swept across the Americas and Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries helped create a powerful colloquial association between the rights-bearing subject and ‘the citizen,’ but the formal legal category of political membership that citizenship now names in the United States is a much more recent invention—established almost a full century after the American Revolution, with the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment on July 9, 1868” (p. 4). This is a big, surprising claim, since those of us who study the history and culture of the United States in the century before the Civil War have tended to assume that we already know, more or less, what citizenship must have meant back then.

According to one familiar story, the figure of the citizen was revolutionary. In an era when the common people were wresting power away from kings and aristocrats, citizenship named a new, democratic way of being in relation to the state. The citizen was the bearer of civil rights and the actor, on an equal footing with all other citizens, in the making of sovereign decisions. This is an appealing story, but

decades of revisionist scholarship have made it sound like something of a fairy tale. Nowadays, when we think about the history of citizenship, we are more likely to think about those who were—and are—excluded from its circle: the displaced, the disfranchised, the imprisoned, and most of all the enslaved, the citizen's negative image, whose status is produced through negation. Thus, according to a second story that has become no less familiar than the first, citizenship names a set of rights whose value to some depends on its being withheld, or violently stripped away, from many others.

These two stories, one of widening inclusion and the other of violent exclusion, seem almost like opposites, but Hyde's research and arguments help us to see that they share a common understanding, indeed a common ideal, of what citizenship ought to signify. "The most ardent fantasies about citizenship," she observes, "have long come from outside the sphere of the law's protections" (p. 9). Hyde is attuned to that kind of ardency, and much of her book concerns itself with the problem of slavery and the movement toward emancipation, which became a project of expanding citizenship. But *Civic Longing* also shows that such fantasies are dreams of perfection, the stuff of immanent critique. What could speak more desperately to the high hopes invested in a concept than protests calling for its expansion to wider and wider human circles? Rather than rejecting the promise of citizenship, they ask for more of it.

The thing I find most powerful about Hyde's critical scholarship is its search for visions of liberation from citizenship itself. She finds these visions in a past that had not yet learned to think about citizenship in the ways that have come, since then, to be naturalized. For one thing, American legal authorities simply did not know what citizenship was supposed to mean. They admitted and worried over this fact. Hyde provides many examples; one of the most striking is in the epigraph she draws from U.S. Attorney General Edward Bates, who openly confessed, "Eighty years of practical enjoyment of citizenship, under the Constitution, have not sufficed to teach us either the exact meaning of the word, or the constituent elements of the thing we prize so highly" (quoted on p. 3). This bewildered statement, by one of the most powerful legal authorities in the country, was composed in 1862.

With the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, the law formally acknowledged the citizenship of "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof." In Hyde's account, this reform was the decisive one. For my part, I still find myself wondering about just which problem it solved. The

Fourteenth Amendment answered one question: who counts as a citizen? But did it answer the more fundamental one: *what does it mean to be a citizen?* The specific rights and obligations entailed in citizenship remained matters of contestation. There were many sources of confusion, but one of them, at least, must have been the distribution of powers between the states and the federal government. In the antebellum years, the causes of slavery and of “states’ rights” had become inextricable. Perhaps what really changed, in the wake of the Union victory, was not what it meant in the United States to *be a citizen*, but simply of what it meant to be a citizen *of the United States* (rather than a citizen of New Hampshire, say, or of South Carolina).

Of greater interest to Hyde, however, are the “speculative” articulations of citizenship that proliferated before 1868, in the absence of a clear legal standard at the federal level. The contest over the meaning and value of citizenship played out in fiction, poetry, essays, and other genres that had no direct claim to legal validity. Some of the liveliest examples come from the fields of religion and literature, each of which found itself, in the antebellum period, more and more alienated from the institutions of law. Having charted what she calls “the retroactive invention of citizenship” in order to unsettle her key concept, Hyde explores the many ways that it was imagined in those other realms.

Hyde demonstrates, for instance, how the notion that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20) became the motto of a style of “Christian estrangement” from the secular concerns of government and society, and how David Walker’s *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* grounded its exhortations against the slave codes in an ideal of “divine law.” The “natural law” of philosophy and the sciences provided another alternative to legal norms, and Hyde shows how Frederick Douglass invoked a kind of natural justice in his novella of rebellion, *The Heroic Slave*, where the very weather seems to muster against human bondage. The final chapters of *Civic Longing* deal especially with fictions of banishment, touching on such famous examples as Nathaniel Hawthorne in “The Custom-House” and Philip Nolan in Edward Everett Hale’s “The Man Without a Country.” Here, Hyde develops the compelling argument that “the romantic reconceptualization of the ‘literary’ as a separate, autonomous realm facilitated the emergence of a secular form of political critique—one that was structured by the comparative logic of the possible, rather than the moral imperatives of righteousness” (pp. 117–18). For literature, as for some people, estrangement from legal power could entail another kind of authority.

When a word takes on a fixed meaning, especially when it becomes an object of scientific inquiry or state regulation, it can seem to refer to something natural, a durable essence. This is where historicism can make a critical intervention. By showing that concepts have histories, that they take shape and change in time in contests over knowledge and power, scholars can recover the weird multiplicity of uses that a term may have enjoyed before it was pinned down. Joining the long tradition of interdisciplinary scholarship on law, religion, and literature in the United States before the Civil War, *Civic Longing* provides a deep and careful excavation of the history of speculative thinking about citizenship. At its best, this work reminds us that there is nothing permanent about our ways of naming, and thus of governing, ourselves and our affiliations. The world could be different, someday; it was before.

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MAI-LIN CHENG, *British Romanticism and the Literature of Human Interest*. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 193. \$95.

Mai-Lin Cheng's *British Romanticism and the Literature of Human Interest* explores how a selection of writers we now consider "Romantic" drew heavily upon an emerging phenomenon of human interest writing in the early nineteenth century. In our time, human interest stories appear as "clickbait" on social media, which continuously recirculates tragic personal accounts similar to those that moved the Wordsworths to share their writing in a more limited sphere. Then, as now, anecdotes of individuals lost beyond hope compelled reprinting, reframing, and layering of new prose, poetry, and paratext, sometimes over many years after the original events. Cheng's book demonstrates how human interest connected poetry inextricably with the prose of the newspaper or sensational novel, not understood as literary like poetry until the nineteenth century. In Cheng's view, drawn from studying the Wordsworths, the Shelleys, and Byron, Romanticism brings prose and poetry together in a new literature built on anecdotes or *histoemes*, not totalizing grand narratives but, rather, passing moments of human interest.

The opening chapters explore how writers "loot[ed]" and recirculated human interest stories in prose appended to poetry to raise