



7-2005

# The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism (Book Review)

R. Bryan Bademan  
*Sacred Heart University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his\\_fac](http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac)

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Bademan, R. Bryan. "The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism" (Book Review). *Religious Studies Review* 31.3-4 (2005): 223.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History Department at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact [ferribyp@sacredheart.edu](mailto:ferribyp@sacredheart.edu).

The Chautauqua Movement: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism. By Andrew C. Rieser (Religion and American Culture Series). New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003. ISBN 9780231126427

Students of American religion can be thankful for this perceptive and critical treatment of the great Chautauqua movement of the turn of last century. The subject of over ninety doctoral dissertations and master's theses since 1930, this movement has remained something of an enigma to the academy. A product of the white Protestant middle class, the lay educational institution known as Chautauqua internalized its many contradictions, and Andrew Rieser skillfully guides readers through many of them. Chautauqua, for example, promoted diversity but rarely served those outside the white Protestant orbit. And when it moved to cross important gender and ethnic lines in the late nineteenth century, it did so by adhering to a racialized notion of middle-class citizenship. Perhaps the most illuminating discussion in the book is Rieser's argument that Chautauqua speakers and participants shared in a "liberal creed," or a "civic religion of progress . . . that accepted an enlarged presence of government . . . to counterbalance the corporate manipulation of desire." Rieser demonstrates that the period witnessing the emergence of modern liberalism baptized its newfound liberal commitments with Protestant faith. Hence Rieser is able to question the well-established notion that the turn-of-the-century middle class staged a managerial and organizational revolution in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. While there is no doubt that middle-class Protestants advocated organizational efficiency, they also demanded that their new progressivism conform to Protestant values. And so in the end, the religiously-inspired liberalism of the United States generated only a soft critique of corporate capitalism.

R. Bryan Bademan

Sacred Heart University