

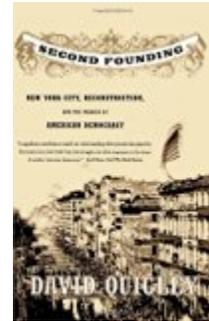
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Quigley. *Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction, and the Making of American Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004. xv + 238 pp. \$14.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8090-8513-2.

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David Quigley's *Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction, and the Making of American Democracy* is an inspiring history of post-Civil War Manhattan. Focusing on debates about equality, freedom, and representation, Quigley links New York history with the nation at large and examines it as a seismograph for nationwide political developments, the effects of which can still be felt today. The historical meaning of the city as a contested space where cultures meet and classes clash predestine it to be a site for scholarly investigation of U.S. democracy. The book's national scope is ambitious yet immediately becomes plausible, given the fact that Reconstruction politics were lastingly influenced by New York politicians and activists, and the mass media. The author shifts from Philadelphia, symbolically America's central eighteenth-century city, to nineteenth-century Manhattan, which had become the nation's stage where the "rules of the democratic game" were negotiated in often dramatic ways (p. ix). By constructing such a historical vanishing point, one runs the risk of establishing a quasi-mythical perspective which neglects the city's dependency not only on the Washington legislature but also, for example, on developments in more remote areas of the Reconstruction South. However, Quigley avoids such an imbalance: *Second Founding* is a careful remapping of the city as both a microcosm of the nation and an early announcement of things to come. As part of a scholarly discourse that seeks to reconstruct the postwar era through local histories, it provides a starting point for work that seeks to link the local to the national and, as Quigley's next book evidently promises, to the international.

As an introduction to what one might call a chaotic

yet constructive crisis, the book's simple structure and narrative ease facilitate orientation. *Second Founding* gives a vivid and sharply defined picture of the era which traces complex developments through a changing set of historical constellations. Much of what it explores is barely new to those interested in the history of New York City and American democracy after the Civil War; and Quigley readily admits that he owes much to related works, such as Sven Beckert's *The Monied Metropolis* (2003), Phyllis F. Field's *The Politics of Race in New York* (1982), or William Gillette's *Retreat from Reconstruction* (1982). Quigley's book, nevertheless, is unique in its marvelous blending of an unusually dense kaleidoscopic view of the local with a transforming national framework. Highlighting how greatly the "second founding" was rooted in Civil War injustices and nationwide Reconstruction, it stresses historical turning points.

Covering the period between 1863 and 1866, part 1 concludes with the New York Democrats congressional campaign for the citizenship of white males. Marking a shift from Republican to Democrat influences, the second part covers the years until the economic depression of 1873. It describes the escalating class tensions and labor unrest, which were met with police violence in the famous Tomkins Square riots of 1874. The book's third part discusses the anti-democratic development of taxpayer conservatism, most visibly supported by the Tilden Commission. Defining the end of Reconstruction with the 1877 election, this section shows how the exclusionist rhetoric of the Tilden era survived in a political culture marked by class-anxiety, anti-immigrant sentiments, and an ideology of white supremacy.

Quigley approaches the emerging democratic city through a number of discourses which belong to what Anthony F. C. Wallace has termed a “cultural maze,” a public culture consisting of symbols and narratives, to which individuals have what he calls “maps.”[1] One of the most prominent narratives is to be found in the term “Reconstruction” itself. *Second Founding* shows that while older notions such as moral “uplift” and the abolitionist cry for “unconditional” reconstruction still resonated through American culture, a new generation of unsentimental “scientific” reformers, who defined Reconstruction as restoration, had gained the upper hand in urban politics. Focusing on key concepts such as liberty, equality, and citizenship, the book establishes an elegant formula to investigate how Republicans and Democrats re-oriented their party programs, leading to the Democrats’ shift towards an elitist ideology that attracted a wide spectrum of Americans both locally and nationally.

One of the accomplishments of this book is the centrality of an African American viewpoint. An important addition to other recent works written in this vein, it demonstrates how New York’s black community insisted on interpreting Reconstruction as interracial democracy, thus interfering directly and from the start with the common perception of the period as white history. Quigley starts from a decisive turning point in black history and in American history *tout court*, the 1863 New York draft riots. Embedding this eruption of violence within the developments of the Civil War and larger class tensions throughout the Northern states, the historian meticulously unearths the political processes that fueled a never-ending conflict along the lines of race, ethnicity, and class.

Preparing the historical backdrop for understanding New York’s conservatism in the 1870s, Quigley dedicates the first part of his investigation to a close analysis of the shift from race to class and explains how a new generation of Republican reformers and former “Copperhead” Democrats fashioned an elitist model of citizenship which excluded both the poor and African Americans. This first part also introduces the reader to key figures of this process—including the black leader Henry Highland Garnet; the editor of the *Nation*, E. L. Godkin; the Liberal Republican John Hecker; and the later presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden. The remainder of the book traces their individual careers and alliances within a shifting political network. Quigley shows that the re-focusing of public attention to questions of hygiene, education, and political corruption distracted New Yorkers

from the Reconstruction of the South and redirected attention to issues of urban control. Discussing the success of Tammany Hall, the book focuses on the power of political rhetoric and illuminates why a return to antebellum state sovereignty soon became a widely accepted political proposition. Stressing the role of the press and individual politicians, Quigley explains how the project of interracial democracy made way for taxpayer conservatism. From a stance which emphasizes the *cultural* implications of historical discourse, one might suggest that disfranchisement along class lines triggered labor reactions, which relied not only on European class theories but also, though largely unconsciously, on an *appropriation* of what had been part of the abolitionist terminological repertoire of “liberty” and “citizenship.” The author, who is a historian, seems to explicitly address an interdisciplinary readership when he occasionally refers to literary figures like Walt Whitman, whose misunderstanding of New York culture does in fact seem to demand further research.

Having established the first phase of Reconstruction as a field of social and racial conflict, Quigley goes on to anchor his analysis in the widespread opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment. In a chapter suitably entitled “An Age of Conventions,” he gives an account of the heightened public activities demanding political representation of African Americans, women, and the poor, or those who fought for the re-imposition of property qualifications as a prerequisite for the vote. Interpreting the Democrats’ success at the 1867 Albany convention and the impact of Horatio Seymour’s presidential campaign as decisive moments in establishing the nationwide appeal of New York’s political profile, *Second Founding* compellingly explains why the predominantly black supporters of equal suffrage were increasingly marginalized. At the same time, Quigley challenges urban histories like David Hammack’s *Power and Society* (1987) by emphasizing the impact of the first two Enforcement Acts on New York’s struggle for interracial democracy. His discussion of the effects of enfranchised Reconstruction is thought provoking; he convincingly argues that by ensuring and protecting equal manhood suffrage, national Reconstruction was redefined through local issues, especially the naturalization frauds of 1868. As a result of increasingly militarized social relations, African Americans became an easy target of arbitrary political and police measures. In its insightful discussion of Reconstruction rhetoric, *Second Founding* shows how the notion of liberty was redefined “in negative terms, as freedom *from* the many dangers of modern urban life: mob rule, cen-

tralism, economic regulation” and how such an understanding was in turn challenged by African Americans and the white laboring class (p. 94).

The book’s ambitious political hypothesis is brought to fruition in the third part, where Quigley explores how New York City presented its anti-Reconstruction program to the nation at large. Focusing on Samuel J. Tilden’s role as a reformer and presidential candidate in what was America’s most controversial nineteenth-century election, he explains how Tilden’s image as a Copperhead and member of the party that harbored the much-discredited Tammany Hall political machine diminished when his battle cry against corruption hit the public ear. Defining the period as the beginning of modern American politics, Quigley demonstrates concisely that Tilden’s rhetoric of reform and retrenchment marked the birth of a successful model for the late nineteenth-century American nation. He suggests that “Tilden’s America” was derived from a very concrete local constellation and an evolving rhetoric that appealed to white conservatives all over the country. Far from construing history as an individual’s accomplishment, Tilden and other powerful figures are introduced as representatives of a network of public institutions. Tirelessly investigating the role of commissions in the shaping of urban politics, Quigley’s analysis draws a dynamic picture of this age of reform and white elite control. The chapter on Tilden provides the background for a dis-

ussion of the labor movement and the African American political struggle in the late 1870s. Zooming in on Tilden’s presidential campaign and its aftermath, the book diagnoses a loss of faith in democracy, which encompassed not only a part of the middle class but also the newly arrived laboring classes and the increasingly isolated African Americans. Closing in on the suffrage restriction plan issued by the Tilden commission, Quigley offers a concise and disturbing account of the unification of forces that promoted economically based exclusion.

Second Founding is a scholarly work and a narrative of the city as nation; it traces both a slow development brought on by often contradictory forces *and* a history which evolved along the lines of dramatic events. Quigley’s narrative zeal becomes most prominent in the epilogue, which seeks to integrate the diverging forces that marked the post-Civil War city in the symbolically charged tomb of General Grant “high above the Hudson River” (p. 176). Somewhat overdetermined, the image of the monument as “a modern democratic vista” (p. 182) is nevertheless an intriguing metaphor for the many facets of the Reconstruction city. Like the book itself this imaginary view holds the reader in its grip.

Note

[1]. Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Culture and Personality* (New York: Random House, 1961), 190.

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