

Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction, and the Making of American Democracy

David Quigley



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At the close of the Civil War, Americans found themselves drawn into a new conflict, one in which the basic shape of the nation's government had to be rethought and new rules for the democratic game had to be established. In this superb new study, David Quigley argues that New York City's politics and politicians lay at the heart of Reconstruction's intense, conflicted drama. In ways that we understand all too well today, New York history became national history.

The establishment of a postwar interracial democracy required the tearing down and rebuilding of many basic tenets of American government, yet, as Quigley shows in dramatic detail, the white supremacist traditions of the nation's leading city militated against a genuine revision of America's racial order, for New York politicians placed limits on the possibilities of true Reconstruction at every turn. Still, change did occur and a new America did take shape. Ironically, it was in New York City that new languages and practices for public life were developing which left an indelible mark on progressive national politics. Quigley's signal accomplishment is to show that the innovative work of New York's black activists, Tammany Democrats, bourgeois reformers, suffragettes, liberal publicists, and trade unionists resulted in a radical redefinition of reform in urban America.

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