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Richard M. Valelly , '75
Swarthmore College, rvalell1@swarthmore.edu

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen* by Philip Dray

Review by: Richard M. Valelly

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The volume is broken into ten thematic chapters, and within each chapter the reader finds documents from across the South. Chapters address flash-points such as contracts, land distribution, insurrection, and compensation at the end of the year (“settling up”). Each chapter starts with a comprehensive introductory essay written by the editors that outlines the major issues covered in the chapter and points to relevant sources in other volumes in the series. The footnotes to these essays also constitute a rich bibliography of the growing scholarship on Reconstruction. A thorough index allows readers to identify documents from a particular state or city, as well as to find information on topics such as suffrage, religion, and various types of labor.

Former slaves were not shy about using the new tools at their disposal; nor were former masters shy about clinging to their former powers. When one freedman in South Carolina told an employer he wished to take his labor contract to a federal military officer for review, the employer killed him. Similar stories of resistance and struggle can be found throughout. Teachers can mine this volume for many such examples to share with their students or ask students to embark on their own exploration of the volume to study topics of interest.

The Freedmen and Southern Society Project is surely familiar to most readers of this journal; suffice it to say here that this book is a remarkable collection of compelling and occasionally heartbreaking documents. The volume offers a perfect window into how chaotic Reconstruction must have been on the ground as former slaves, former masters, and the military attempted to answer questions about authority and the meaning of a war that was still so fresh in their minds.

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian AARON W. MARRS

The views expressed by the author are solely those of the author and are not necessarily the official views of the Office of the Historian, the U.S. Department of State, or the U.S. government.

Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen. By Philip Dray. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008. Pp. [xvi], 463. \$30.00, ISBN 978-0-618-56370-8.)

Reconstruction showcased a male, biracial public sphere: black and white male officeholders at the national, state, and local levels doing legislative, administrative, and judicial work together. African American politicians took dozens of legislative actions and gave speeches in the House and Senate, before crowds, and in public halls that attracted admiring public notice—but just as often angry, racist reactions. Surprisingly, besides individual articles or book-length biographies and Eric Foner’s essential reference work *Freedom’s Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction* (New York, 1993), there has not been, until now, a full modern discussion of them. Yet these talented, ambitious politicians have long needed a complete group portrait—and not the sort of Dunningite dismissal they received from Samuel Denny Smith in *The Negro in Congress, 1870–1901* (Chapel Hill, 1940). With *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction through the Lives of the First*

Black Congressmen, Philip Dray fills that gap with great literary verve and profound psychological and historical insight.

Dray's essential insight—one self-evidently resonant in the era of President Barack Obama—is that the service of black members of Congress during Reconstruction was a huge political novelty that caught all of America's attention and got several national conversations going about black officeholding and what it said about the country's development. The politicians whom Dray portrays were fascinating and very ambitious characters. They were quintessentially self-made men who grasped the opportunities for making a mark that were opened up by Reconstruction.

Dray deftly interweaves dozens of political, legislative, and legal stories and biographies. His work is based on an efficient, no-nonsense tour through the secondary literature and a small set of choice primary sources. He worked in these sources quickly, to be sure, but with a literary journalist's eye for telling details and spoken words that will keep the reader turning the page. All kinds of things come through in fresh ways: the controversy over the Senate seating of P. B. S. Pinchback of Louisiana; the sensation of South Carolina representative Robert Brown Elliott's great speech in favor of civil rights legislation; the profound disillusionment of Blanche K. Bruce, a senator from Mississippi, with the Ulysses S. Grant administration. These are just a few examples of eye-opening storytelling that can be culled from the book.

With complete narrative control Dray also locates the public history of Reconstruction's openness to both black and white male political ambition against the counterpoint of white conspiracy and violence that, like termites, ate away at the foundation of the new era. Thus Dray traces the so-called Mississippi Plan: to provoke a riot that then led to the violent displacement of local black officeholders in a pogrom-like frenzy unleashed by whites over the course of several days. Or, he shows how the demand for joint Republican-Democratic electioneering led to the Redemption of Mississippi by providing a veneer of democratic and deliberative legitimacy to Democratic hooliganism and paramilitary displays of white supremacist force. In places Dray's narrative assurance is actually quite breathtaking. His discussions of the byzantine politics of Louisiana are the clearest and most succinct that one can find, as is his telling of the Mississippi and South Carolina stories.

Moreover, Dray does a fine job of carrying the stories past the Compromise of 1877, treating the Exodusters, the post-Reconstruction black congressmen, such as George H. White of North Carolina, and the final days of the men whose lives he chronicles. The book executes a grand arc from the moment when South Carolina's Robert Smalls smuggled a Confederate warship out of Charleston's harbor to White's farewell speech in the House of Representatives in 1901.

For this reviewer there are, however, a couple of quibbles worth noting. Dray accepts at face value the thesis that the U.S. Supreme Court abandoned African Americans. The story is more complex. For instance, *United States v. Cruikshank* (1876) was not actually a state action decision; instead, Chief Justice Morrison Remick Waite expressly conceded the government's claim that Congress could regulate racially motivated private conspiracies against exercise of the right to vote. The decision for the Court turned on the technical

requirements of criminal indictments under the new election laws, as the brief for the United States shows. Also, in this reviewer's opinion Dray treats Booker T. Washington incorrectly and unfairly.

But these are relatively minor matters. *Capitol Men* is a breath of fresh air. It is a wonderful teaching volume, certain to hold the attention of students. Historians and political scientists will see the Reconstruction and the post-Reconstruction periods with new eyes after reading this fine book.

Swarthmore College

RICHARD M. VALELLY

Good Order and Safety: A History of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, 1861–1906. By Allen E. Wagner. (St. Louis: Missouri History Museum, c. 2008. Pp. xviii, 532. \$29.95, ISBN 978-1-883982-63-8.)

Good Order and Safety: A History of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, 1861–1906 is an institutional history of law enforcement in nineteenth-century St. Louis, Missouri. Written by Allen E. Wagner, a criminologist and former police officer, the book weaves together the evolution of the city's Metropolitan Police Department with the day-to-day experiences of policemen on the beat. As a popular history of an important urban institution, it succeeds in outlining the department's changing relationship to local and state politics and in capturing policemen's working lives. Although it will disappoint historians hoping for a critical analysis along the lines of Dennis C. Rousey's *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans, 1805–1889* (Baton Rouge, 1996), it is a useful resource for scholars of police, urban, St. Louis, and Missouri history.

The majority of the book is devoted to the relationship between policing and partisan politics. Before the Civil War, responsibility for the suppression of disorder in St. Louis had shifted from a constabulary of white male residents to a professional, uniformed police force under the direction of a chief appointed by the mayor. In 1861 secessionist sympathizers in the state government enacted legislation designed to undermine the city's Unionists by shifting control of the police force to a board of police commissioners appointed by the governor. Over the next forty years, control of the board became a constant source of tension between local and state authorities and among factions within the dominant Democratic Party.

Alongside this political narrative, Wagner charts changes in the working lives of St. Louis's police officers. He maps the spread of the police presence across the metropolitan area through the acquisition of real estate and the adoption of new modes of transportation and communication. These new methods and technologies demanded new skills, and Wagner follows the move from on-the-job training to a formal Police School of Instruction. At its most intimate, the book tells the stories of police officers killed and injured in the line of duty and details the forms of mutual aid that policemen developed to care for injured comrades and their families.

The book's greatest strength and weakness is its source base. Wagner relies heavily on department records housed at the Missouri History Museum and at the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Academy Library, especially the minutes of the St. Louis Board of Police Commissioners. The minutes provide him with