

versity Press, 2008. xiv, 528 pp. \$65.00, ISBN 978-0-8071-3324-8.)

In this impressive study of the constitutional conventions prompted by the Reconstruction Act of 1867, Richard L. Hume and Jerry B. Gough present a wealth of data on the 1,018 delegates who wrote new state constitutions guaranteeing political equality for African American men. From the election of delegates through votes on issues such as public education to ratification, the authors also reveal the political seeds of southern redemption. Contrary to the popular conception of Reconstruction politics as dominated by African Americans and corrupt northern whites (or carpetbaggers), Hume and Gough's work shows that scalawags, or native-born southern whites, dominated these conventions. Native-born southerners were also the most divided group. While African Americans and white delegates from outside the South showed strong support for Republican positions, southern whites split among radical, conservative, and swing positions.

After presenting brief collective biographies of convention delegates, Hume and Gough divide the ten constitutional conventions into five chapters, pairing states that offer useful political comparisons. For example, chapter four examines Alabama and Mississippi, the only states where radical constitutions were rejected by voters. The next chapter considers Georgia and North Carolina, states where the governors, representing two extremes of the Republican party, exercised enormous influence. While the authors classify William Holden of North Carolina as a radical, they describe Joseph Brown as a conservative pragmatist. Due to Brown's influence, the Georgia constitution granted black men the right to vote, but deliberately failed to guarantee their right to hold office. As a result, white Republicans excluded newly elected blacks from the state legislature until the federal government forced them to do otherwise. Unsurprisingly, this exclusion created an atmosphere of distrust between white and black Republicans in the state. Though the Louisiana and South Carolina conventions have received the most scholarly attention, Hume and Gough describe them as atypical because they were the

only two conventions in which blacks made up a majority of the delegates. In other conventions, blacks were underrepresented both as delegates and as committee chairs.

Supplementing graphs and tables with clearly written analysis of their data, Hume and Gough succeed in creating a detailed picture of these diverse conventions. But perhaps the most valuable aspect of their project lies in identifying the black, white, and mixed-race delegates. To gather biographical information, the authors used the 1860 and 1870 censuses, and they include information not only on race and age, but also on region, slave-owning status, occupation, and wealth. Noticeably absent, however, is information on marital status, composition of households, and number and age of children. Still, this volume will be an essential resource for scholars of Reconstruction and American political and constitutional history.

Carol Faulkner
Syracuse University
Syracuse, New York

Public Culture: Diversity, Democracy, and Community in the United States. Ed. by Marguerite S. Shaffer. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. xvi, 376 pp. \$59.95, ISBN 978-0-8122-4081-8.)

American studies and other scholarly approaches to the history of American cultural production have evolved since the mid-twentieth century to emphasize diversity and difference over a broad shared identity. Fueled by the poststructural linguistic turn, scholars have used the provisional nature of language to plot the fractured segments of distinct groups. *Public Culture* remarkably manages to turn this formulation on its head, while still acknowledging the validity of those fractures.

Edward Linenthal's work exemplifies that synthesis by examining the politics of memory in three different sites of violence in Oklahoma. In remembering the 1868 contest between the American military and the Cheyenne Indians, for example, different Oklahoma groups could not even agree on whether the event was a "battle" or a "massacre." They still cannot. Differences over the area have not run their

course, but that is, in fact, the point. The site is now a national park and remains a place of mourning and learning—"an activist program of cultural education"—whose meaning continues to change with the time and situation of its visitors (p. 59).

So our words, our definitions, are not provisional. Instead, those moments of reckoning when our definitions align become the temporal signposts for cultural identity. Whether or not we are talking past each other, and whether or not the process of Americanization is to one degree or another a process of defining oneself against the received norms of the system, there remains a fundamental strain of Americanness within those who choose to use nationhood to define themselves. This Americanness is variable and ultimately temporary, but it does not disappear. It transmogrifies. And it does so through the experiences, debates, and semiotics of the public sphere.

American cultural studies, then, are for Marguerite S. Shaffer and the authors she deftly places together, political—even when, as Hal Rothman notes, certain strains of public discourse become stakes games about the private sphere. In this formulation (Shaffer uses the trope of Hannah Arendt's table, an object that simultaneously separates and brings us together) even "privacy" is entered through the door of public culture. And it is still political—it still provides authenticity in the creation of that Americanness—even when the discourse is gerrymandered by those groups that the postmoderns would read as sources of division. Lynn Spiegel, for example, finds continuity through contingency in her analysis of the changing dynamic of television programming after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Susan Strasser finds it through manipulation in the advertising campaigns for patent medicines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Most importantly, in the grand game of diversity, hegemony, and commonality (or, to wit, "diversity, democracy, and community"), *Public Culture* does not necessarily pick a winner. Scholars find shared identities and shared definitions through multiple avenues, whether systematically imposed, pulled from the wreckage of conflict and compromise, or housed in the process of memorialization and collective

memory. We are left with difference, but also with shared spaces, shared ideas, and—in varying degrees—a shared identity.

Thomas Aiello

University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Lafayette, Louisiana

Hero of Hispaniola: America's First Black Diplomat, Ebenezer D. Bassett. By Christopher Teal. (Westport: Praeger, 2008. xii, 206 pp. \$39.95, ISBN 978-0-313-35195-2.)

Amid worldwide interest in the election and inauguration of the first African American president, Christopher Teal gives us a work that illuminates the world of the first African American to serve as chief diplomatic officer of a U.S. foreign legation. Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett served as the Grant administration's minister resident and chargé d'affaires in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, from 1869 to 1877, a period corresponding to the middle and late years of Reconstruction in the United States. The chronological moment and geographic location of Bassett's achievement was and remains unsurprising, and other parallels of time and place abound as well. Bassett's tenure in Haiti was particularly noteworthy for numerous incidents of diplomatic asylum as Bassett found himself a champion of "laudable sentiments of humanity" in strife-torn Haiti (p. 84). The story is an important one, not least because Bassett figures in any recounting of the long-standing and wide-ranging issue of human rights in American foreign relations.

Yet Bassett's experience remains to be told in anything approaching its full meaning. Teal, an American foreign service officer with extensive service in Latin America (including Haiti), engages the topic with sincere zeal and empathy for Bassett and the circumstances of his tenure in Port-au-Prince. But the balance of the book, which displays stark shortcomings of critical analysis and source materials, will fail to captivate even the most empathic of readers. Professional scholars will quickly seize on Teal's principal failing: he draws on American materials only, an insurmountable liability given his interest in evaluating American influence abroad. His title, after all, proclaims Bassett a "hero," and the author certainly means

Copyright of *Journal of American History* is the property of *Organization of American Historians* and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.