



When Bad Men Combine

The Star Route Scandal and the Twilight of Gilded Age Politics

SHAWN FRANCIS PETERS

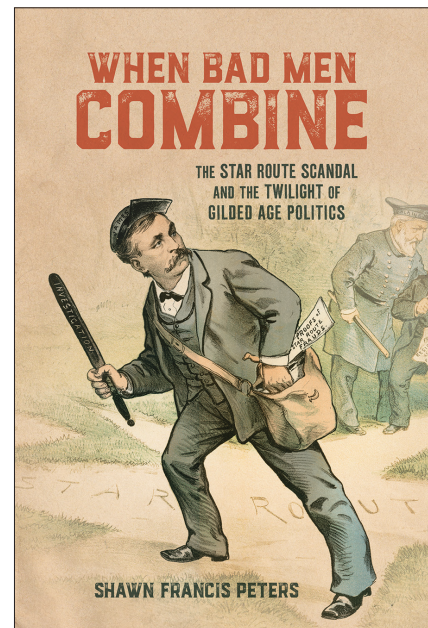
PRAISE FOR *WHEN BAD MEN COMBINE*

“Shawn Francis Peters’s narrative of the Star Route frauds is at least a hundred years overdue. Casual readers, as well as professionals in the field, will deem it well worth the wait.”—Mark Wahlgren Summers, author of *The Era of Good Stealings*

“In this crisply written and important book, Peters tells the story of the dogged federal prosecutors who sought to bring to justice the conspirators of the infamous Star Route bid-rigging ring who bilked millions from the United States Post Office. An evocative legal tale of Gilded Age corruption.”—Michael A. Ross, author of *The Great New Orleans Kidnapping Case: Race, Law, and Justice in the Reconstruction Era*

“Like a detective on a cold case, Peters unravels a tangled web of unscrupulous contractors and crooked politicians who helped make this one of the most corrupt eras in American history.”—Cameron Blevins, author of *Paper Trails: The US Post and the Making of the American West*

“Combining sharp analysis with the skills of a storyteller, Peters explains the deep linkage between spoilsmen and postal services during the 1870s and 1880s. *When Bad Men Combine* reminds us that the biggest scandals unfold over decades, not weeks or even years, by shaking the very foundations of the party system itself.”—Jeffrey D. Broxmeyer, author of *Electoral Capitalism: The Party System in New York’s Gilded Age*



The Star Route scandal captured the nation’s attention for more than a decade, with newspapers throughout the United States characterizing it as an unprecedented case of Gilded Age graft. Shawn Francis Peters’s *When Bad Men Combine* provides a glimpse into this uniquely tumultuous period marked by brazen greed and duplicity. In the first book to offer a full recounting of the Star Route maelstrom, which roiled American politics during the 1870s and 1880s, Peters reveals how postal service corruption resulted in a remarkable legal case that featured jury bribery and document theft. *When Bad Men Combine* follows the saga to its culmination as two sensational criminal trials presented evidence implicating some of the most prominent men in America and, perhaps, led to the assassination of President James Garfield.

SHAWN FRANCIS PETERS is an instructor at the Center for Educational Opportunity at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he also earned a PhD in United States history. He is the author of six books, including *The Infamous Harry Hayward: A True Account of Murder and Mesmerism in Gilded Age Minneapolis*.

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