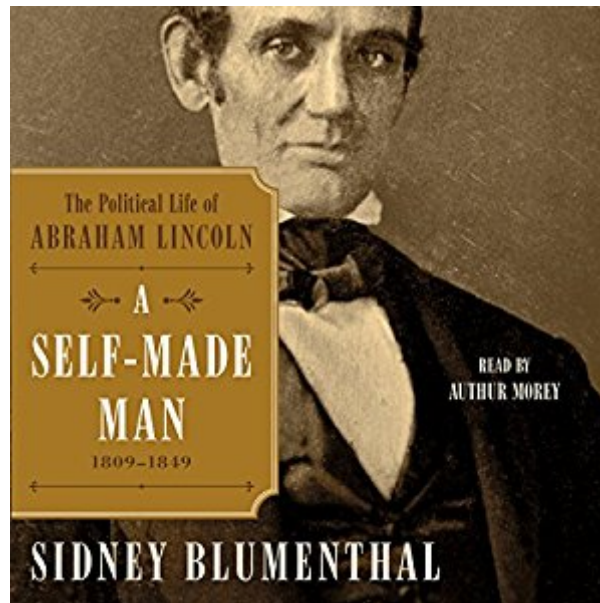




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A Self-Made Man: The Political Life Of Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1849



Synopsis

The first of a multivolume history of Lincoln as a political genius - from his obscure beginnings to his presidency, his assassination, and the overthrow of his post-Civil War dreams of Reconstruction. This first volume traces Lincoln from his painful youth, describing himself as "a slave", to his emergence as the man we recognize as Abraham Lincoln. From his youth as a "newsboy", a voracious newspaper reader, Lincoln became a freethinker, reading Tom Paine as well as Shakespeare and the Bible and studying Euclid to sharpen his arguments as a lawyer. Lincoln's antislavery thinking began in his childhood amid the primitive Baptist antislavery dissidents in backwoods Kentucky and Indiana, the roots of his repudiation of Southern Christian proslavery theology. Intensely ambitious, he held political aspirations from his earliest years. Obsessed with Stephen Douglas, his political rival, he battled him for decades. Successful as a circuit lawyer, Lincoln built his team of loyalists. Blumenthal reveals how Douglas and Jefferson Davis, acting together, made possible Lincoln's rise. Blumenthal describes a socially awkward suitor who had a nervous breakdown over his inability to deal with the opposite sex. His marriage to the upper-class Mary Todd was crucial to his social aspirations and his political career. Blumenthal portrays Mary as an asset to her husband, a rare woman of her day, with strong political opinions. He discloses the impact on Lincoln's antislavery convictions when handling his wife's legal case to recover her father's fortune, in which he discovered her cousin was a slave. Blumenthal's robust portrayal is based on prodigious research of Lincoln's record and of the period and its main players. It reflects both Lincoln's time and the struggle that consumes our own political debate.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Very thorough read, perhaps too thorough at times, but I learned a few things about Lincoln's life that I did not know -- quite a feat for a man that has been so well written about.

Great read, extremely well written!

A detailed history of Lincoln's early life up to the end of his congressional term. The politics in his day were as convoluted as ours, but he managed to navigate those treacherous waters. A little known fact: his father sold Abraham's labor when he was but a child. He worked as a child slave.

The first of a planned multi-volume covers up to 1856-1857 (when the slavery issue became inflamed by the Dred Scott decision and the caning of Charles Sumner). The book contains many anecdotes supporting the somewhat revisionist history that Lincoln started out as more of an opportunist politician and gradually evolved his anti-slavery position. Examples: as a aggressive Whig smearing Democrat Van Buren in 1836 presidential election (called him a secret abolitionist); his strenuous letter writing efforts to secure a political appointment after his one term in congress. The book also features extensive discussions of Calhoun, Jackson, Polk, Taylor, Scott, Garrison, Seward, Weed, and their associates whose relevancy to Lincoln is not well explained. Also not explained is how/why Illinois changed from strongly pro-slavery at the start of Lincoln's career to strongly anti slavery by the late 1850's. Was it because all the slaveowners and their supporters moved to Missouri, or was it because of the growth of Chicago.

The book is a thorough and well-written introduction of the man Lincoln was before he became president. There is a lot of new information, which is surprising, considering how many books have been written about him. I found this one to be totally engrossing. I was pleased to hear there will be additional volumes because this one left me wanting more. I highly recommend it.

Excellent and well researched. It is always a wonder to have more insight into the Lincoln legacy. I look forward to volume Two.

I gave this book to a close friend who is a hard core civil war enthusiast, and he couldn't stop

thanking me enough. It is a very unique perspective on Abraham Lincoln's life, and a must read for history buffs.

I've read almost every major Lincoln bio printed in the past 50 years. Blumenthal's is the best of the bunch.

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