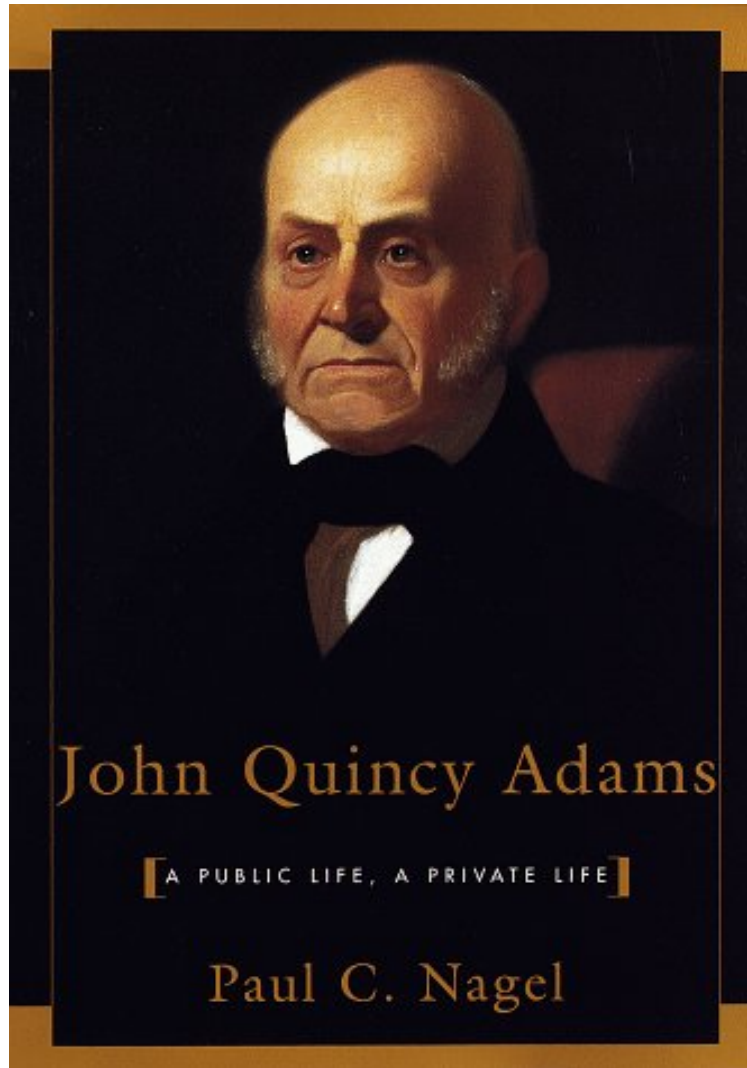


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John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, A Private Life

Paul C. Nagel

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Paul C. Nagel : John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, A Private Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, A Private Life:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great psychological profile of JQA the personBy Robert G. RosenthalJohn Quincy Adams (or JQA) was a brilliant, but troubled man, who never seemed to feel as if he accomplished very much. A Harvard educated Lawyer, scholar, writer, orator, diplomat, and having served in public office for over 60 years, he was his own worst enemy.Like his father, the 2nd President John Adams, John Quincy Adams was a difficult person, and a person who liked to be surrounded in controversy, and was not afraid of forcing his opinion on others. This led to his developing many enemies in government, among which were his successor as

President, Andrew Jackson, and others. Over his life, his dread of slavery and concern about its spread of in the United States, made him despised by many in the South, where human enslavement thrived throughout his lifetime. His denouncement of it, and growing hatred of it throughout his life and career made him the brunt of jokes, ridicule in the press, and a target for bullies while serving in government. His oratory skills, however, drove the sentiment among the public (mostly in the north) to speak out against the horrors of slavery. An interesting character, his personality was formed by a driving father, and strong mother who rarely showed trust of belief in her son. She constantly berated him as he was young, and even into adulthood, about watching out for temptations of flesh. She never trusted that he would follow "Christian" morals. Eventually, she shut off his communication with her, failing to respond to her letters. Raised primarily in Europe, where his father was a diplomat, he developed a fondness for all things European and became fluent in several languages. His diplomatic skills honed, he was first appointed to the US Diplomatic Corps by George Washington. Throughout his diplomatic career, he was assigned to France, England, Holland, Belgium and Russia. He returned to the US where he was elected to Congress, and eventually became Secretary of State under President James Monroe. He followed Monroe as President. Although he lost the popular vote to Andrew Jackson, he was given the Presidency by the House of Representatives. This caused severe tension in government, led by those who felt he stole the Presidency from the one who deserved it and won the popular vote. There was a wedge drawn between him and the southern states, and the spite shown to him caused his Presidency to be largely a failure and uneventful. He lost his second term to Jackson in what has become known as the bitterest election in the history of the United States. Although he largely felt a failure, he was elected to Congress where he served until the day he died. He was not only a champion of freeing the slaves, he argued and fought in congress for ensuring the US was a peaceful country. When the US went to war with Mexico over ownership of what is now Texas, he was one of a dozen congressmen who voted against the war. If I were to diagnose JQA, psychologically, I would guess that he was bipolar and paranoid. He had tremendous highs, where he would travel, orate and write journals, and serious lows where he would contemplate his own death. Louisa, his wife of over 50 years, served to help him through these crises, although it took a tremendous toll on her. She was his intellectual equal, and was the first of the First Ladies of the United States who did more than simply entertain guests. I found the book remarkable. At 400 pages, it is certainly not the longest book written about a US politician. The author, Paul Nagel, drew his research primarily from the volumes of personal documents the former President left behind. Interestingly, with all of his remarkable accomplishments, only one chapter is dedicated to his Presidency. Given everything else the man accomplished in his life, one chapter probably was enough. But, I found the level of detail in the book to be both a help and a hindrance. There were times where the tedium was high, and reading became difficult. All in all, the detail in the book brought life to a man dead for almost 200 years. I applaud this book as a real triumph in showing the character of a man who had a tremendous impact on the development of this new country. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Enjoyable and Informative By Sean Claycamp I'm nearly at the halfway point of my mission to read a biography of each President. I would put this bio in the top third of those I've read for a variety of reasons. First, it was the perfect length. JQA was an important President but was he TJ, Roosevelt, Truman, Nixon, Lincoln... no. Nothing that important happened when he was President at least in a very broad, international sense. I'm very glad the author didn't lengthen the biography and make it detailed to a fault just to make it look like he did more research or overvalued the importance of JQA. JQA was quite a character. Clearly he was an intelligent man. I loved the way the author talked about what JQA read. In fact, I might even read some of those books myself because as with nearly every President, they gathered most of their intelligence from reading on their own. I liked the fact that the author included all the info about JQA's literary, research and professorship. I didn't get the point of how the author pointed out JQA's schedule so often, when he got up, what he did all day, that got a bit old. Other than that, it was really a great biography that shed a lot of light on this man. A few things I found interesting about JQA that the author did a good job detailing. 1. Abigail and John Adams really put a lot of pressure on their son. That was very apparent and made JQA a sympathetic person at times. 2. JQA was a stick in the mud a lot of times so it is easy to see why a lot of people didn't like him. It also explains why his presidency isn't held in such high regard. I thought it very telling that on Andrew Jackson's deathbed JQA was very uncomplimentary. I would've hated to cross him. 3. And perhaps this is the most interesting. JQA couldn't rise above the pressure that was put on him by his parents. He passed that pressure on to his kids, causing one to kill himself. Of course, I do think he mellowed as he got older which the author detailed allowing him to become a sympathetic figure again. Lastly, how about the fact that JQA died pretty much in congress. Wow, what dedication. Good bio that I would recommend. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great American By Jack Murray John Quincy Adams is an amazing American. The range of his contributions to our history and to the spirit of America is amazing. He was not cuddly. He could have done so much more as president (cf. Barack Obama) if he'd had the right Congress. As it is, all that he wanted very soon came to be, especially in infrastructure. Everyone should also read Henry Adams's account of JQ, by then an old man, walking him to school after finding him playing hooky. Nagel's volume is a must-read.

February 21, 1848, the House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.: Congressman John Quincy Adams, rising to speak, suddenly collapses at his desk; two days later, he dies in the Speaker's chamber. The public mourning that

followed, writes Paul C. Nagel, "exceeded anything previously seen in America." Forgotten was his failed presidency and his often cold demeanor. It was the memory of an extraordinary human being--one who in his last years had fought heroically for the right of petition and against a war to expand slavery--that drew a grateful people to salute his coffin in the Capitol and to stand by the railroad tracks as his bier was transported from Washington to Boston. Nagel probes deeply into the psyche of this cantankerous, misanthropic, erudite, hardworking son of a former president whose remarkable career spanned many offices: minister to Holland, Russia, and England, U.S. senator, secretary of state, president of the United States (1825-1829), and, finally, U.S. representative (the only ex-president to serve in the House). On the basis of a thorough study of Adams' seventy-year diary, among a host of other documents, the author gives us a richer account than we have yet had of JQA's life--his passionate marriage to Louisa Johnson, his personal tragedies (two sons lost to alcoholism), his brilliant diplomacy, his recurring depression, his exasperating behavior--and shows us why, in the end, only Abraham Lincoln's death evoked a greater outpouring of national sorrow in nineteenth-century America. We come to see how much Adams disliked politics and hoped for more from life than high office; how he sought distinction in literary and scientific endeavors, and drew his greatest pleasure from being a poet, critic, translator, essayist, botanist, and professor of oratory at Harvard; how tension between the public and private Adams vexed his life; and how his frustrations kept him masked and aloof (and unpopular). Nagel's great achievement, in this first biography of America's sixth president in a quarter century, is finally to portray Adams in all his talent and complexity.

.com Who is the real John Quincy Adams? The brilliant secretary of state, prime mover behind the Monroe Doctrine, and principled opponent of slavery, defender of the Africans shanghaied aboard the *Amistad*? Or the ineffectual president stymied by a hostile Congress and his own self-righteousness, the vindictive political foe famed for his cold, disagreeable character? Paul C. Nagel, author of two previous books about the Adams family, seeks to give readers a more human Adams (1767-1848) whose complex nature contained many contradictions. John Quincy Adams is a valuable revisionist biography of a misunderstood figure at the crossroads of American history. From Library Journal
Of all American public figures, none led a more remarkable life than John Quincy Adams. The son of a president, Adams was an elected congressman, an accomplished diplomat, a president himself, and, after vacating the White House in virtual disgrace, a congressman once again from 1831 until his death in 1848. He was a man of letters, had a passion for science and technology, and, more important for the historian, kept a diary for nearly 70 years. With this excellent biography, Nagel continues a string of successful books on America's first families--the Adamses and the Lees (e.g., *Descent from Glory*, LJ 12/1/82, and *The Lees of Virginia*, LJ 6/15/90). Nagel focuses more on the private Adams, utilizing diary entries to provide keen insight into this extraordinary man, who often suffered from severe depression. The result is a fascinating psychobiography. Highly recommended for all libraries. ?Boyd Childress, Auburn Univ. Lib., Ala. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sA groundbreaking work on one of America's undeservedly neglected great figures that draws on John Quincy Adams's voluminous diaries. The son of President John Adams, "JQA" (as he often signed himself) seemed born to a life of brilliant public service: He served as secretary to the US envoy to Russia in 1781 at the age of 14 and acted as an assistant to the commission that negotiated the peace that ended the American Revolution. He later served as ambassador to Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain, as a US senator, as secretary of state under President Monroe, and as president (1825-29). Nagel acknowledges that JQA's was a "failed presidency," the result of dogged charges of a "corrupt bargain": Having lost the popular poll, he won the presidency due to the influence of Speaker Henry Clay, who was then offered the office of secretary of state. JQA's greatest public service came during his long tenure (1831-48) in the House of Representatives after his presidency. At the risk of censure for misconduct and in violation of the "gag rule" against discussing antislavery laws in the House, he attempted to present a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery and then hundreds of antislavery petitions. He also argued the *Amistad* case before the Supreme Court, which won freedom for slaves who had taken over a slave ship. Nagel (*Descent from Glory: Four Generations of the John Adams Family*, 1983) also acknowledges that JQA's "iron mask," his cold and aloof demeanor, contributed to his unpopularity. But the author attributes this to a recurring depression and contends that JQA was an engaging and affectionate man who wrote well-received poetry, loved scholarship, enjoyed rambling around his home in Quincy, Mass., and was a devoted husband and father. A finely detailed portrait of a wrongly neglected American statesman who was not a great president, but who was a great hero. (16 pages photos, not seen) -- Copyright 1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.