



Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics

Frederick J. Blue

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Chase wanted so much to make a name for himself in American politics that early in his career he considered changing his fishy appellation to the more important sounding Spencer Paynce Cheyce. That alteration never came about, but even without a fancy name, the New England-born, Ohio-bred attorney devoted his life to public serve at many levels of government.

Chase served as Free-Soil Senator from Ohio, as Governor of that pivotal Midwestern state, as Secretary of the Treasury under Lincoln, and as Chief Justice of the United States, although he never realized his primary ambition the presidency. Complex, overly ambitious, and deeply religious, Chase perhaps undermined his presidential hopes partly by his strong antislavery stance, but primarily by his failure to organize systematically his drive for national office.

Chase worked hard for the rights of fugitive slaves and became prominent in the antislavery movement and in the establishment of the Liberty and Free-Soil parties, but he was often accused of being concerned only with his personal advancement. Frederick Blue has done extensive research among Chase s voluminous and often hard-to-read correspondence, and has incorporated pertinent collateral primary and secondary sources as well, to produce the first modern biography of this key Civil War era personality.

Blue searches for the man behind the actions, and his conclusions are enlightening and fascinating. Chase comes alive as an individual who overcomes personal tragedy and finds happiness and fulfillment perhaps in no other place than in his work.

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