



## Bogart

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A.M. Sperber and Eric Lax's entertaining and richly documented study is structured as a tale of painful dramas within ever-expanding dramas, beginning with Humphrey Bogart's childhood. The outward success of his parents masked a sordid reality of social pretension, alcoholism, drug abuse, physical intimidation of their children, and overall emotional sterility. All of this contributed to Bogart's early aimlessness and failures (at school and in the Navy), later insecurity, self-doubt, loneliness, heavy drinking, and barely controllable anger and depression, and, ironically, astonishing ability to portray haunted and tormented characters.

The melodrama of his early life was amplified by his life in Hollywood, working in a studio system with abuses built in to its production routine. The authors nicely chronicle Bogart's bumpy path from stage-struck youth to bit player to major star, constantly butting heads with Warner Brothers production chief Jack Warner, Jr., portrayed here as manipulative and tyrannical, but helped along the way by such key figures as John Huston, arguably Bogart's most important director, and, of course, Lauren Bacall.

The final context in which Bogart's life is portrayed is perhaps the most surprising for an actor who specialized in playing apparently apolitical characters and loners: the political arena. Bogart's liberalism and active support of such causes as free speech, civil and labor rights, and the war against fascism literally threatened his career, and Sperber and Lax treat him as a casualty of the blacklist period.

This biography modifies but also deepens the sense of Bogart as a hero. Bogart's story, in real life and on screen, is not so much one of achieved happiness and victory over circumstances but rather one of scarred endurance and the relentless struggle for integrity in the face of overwhelming odds.

## Sources for Further Study

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