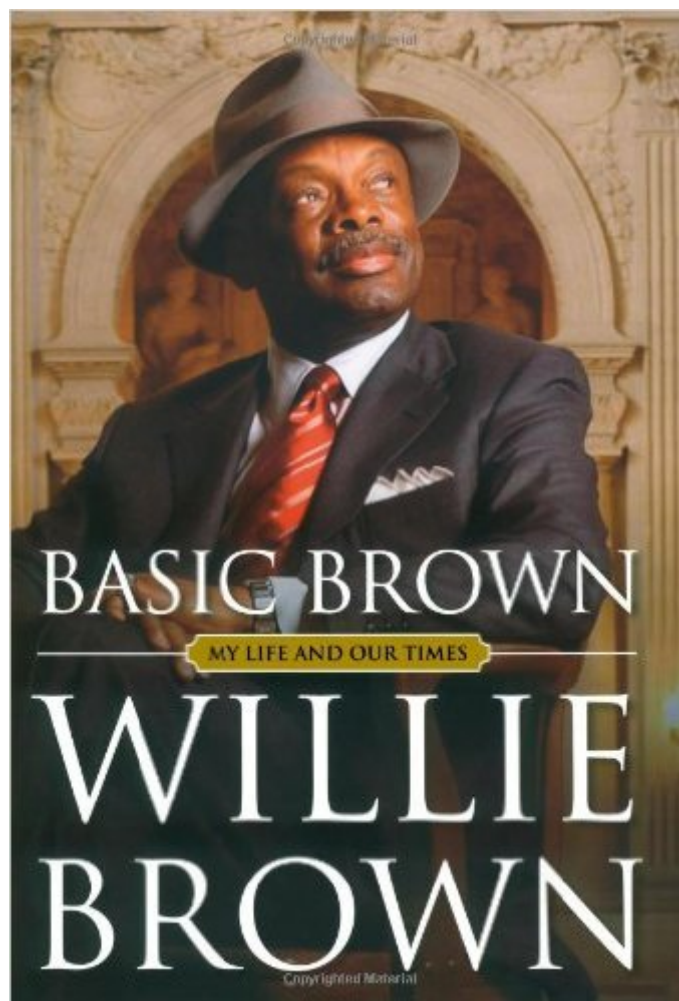


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# Basic Brown: My Life And Our Times



## Synopsis

To The Washington Post, he's "The Last Political Showman of the 20th Century." Bill Clinton has called him "the real Slick Willie." Ronald Reagan's secretary of state George Shultz called this famously liberal politician "a man of his word" and endorsed his successful candidacy for mayor of San Francisco. Indeed Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton both called upon him for advice and help. He is Willie L. Brown, Jr., and he knows how to get things done in politics, how to work both sides of the aisle to get results. Compared to him, Machiavelli looks meek. And drab. In *Basic Brown*, this product of rural, segregated Texas and the urban black neighborhoods of San Francisco tells how he rose through the civil rights movement to become the most potent black politician in America through his shrewd understanding and use of political power and political money. He adapts the lessons he has learned so they can be used by anyone -- black, female, male -- intent on acquiring political power. And this master of the political deal demonstrates why deals are not enough, and that political power grows only when public good is being done. Willie Brown shows how some of the most far-reaching and socially advanced legislation in American history -- like gun control, legalized abortion, gay rights, and school funding -- was carried out under his guidance and on his watch, and tells of the ingenuity, the political machinations, and the personal perseverance that were required to enact what now seems to many to be obvious legislation. These are stories of breathtaking, sometimes hilarious ruses and gambits that show that even the most high-minded legislation needs the assistance of the skills of a shark, which is what Willie Brown often sees himself as. *Basic Brown* is a compendium of insights and stories on the real forces governing power in American political life that will leave you looking at politics anew. It is also the inspiring and funny story of the rise of a gawky teenager in mail-order shoes and trousers who rose to entertain royalty and schoolchildren, superstars and supersize egos, the saintly and the scholarly, while working to transform and open American politics. If you ever wanted to learn how to be slick, a shark, a do-gooder, and a man of your word, Willie L. Brown, Jr., is the storyteller for you. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is the autobiography of Willie Brown, who spent 14 years as a powerful Speaker of the California House of Representatives. The implementation of legislative term limits would force him to leave office for the lesser important office of Mayor of San Francisco. While the last sentence was mostly facetious, it is interesting to note that many would rather have a long term career being a legislative leader over being a big city Mayor. As Willie Brown puts it, "I would still be Speaker today were it not for term limits, a destructive idea introduced by the mean-spirited wretches from Southern California who sought to deprive the people of San Francisco the right to reelect me as their Assemblyman." In a further irony, the "Gang of Five" state legislators who successfully fought to implement term limits included Gary Condit, who would be elected to Congress only to lose reelection over the scandal involving the an affair with his intern and Jerry Eaves who would later be convicted for taking bribes. A chance meeting made the difference in Brown's political life. By standing in alphabetical order at Air Force ROTC brought Brown standing next to, and befriending, John Burton. Burton, himself later a U.S. Representative, was the brother of Phil Burton, a powerful San Francisco politician. Phil helped Willie Brown run for office. Brown lost his first state legislative election in 1962 by 900 votes out of 31,000 votes cast. Brown kept campaigning and was elected in 1964. Ironically, he would vote against Jess Unruh, his future ally, for Speaker. Willie Brown admittedly is a colorful politician. One of his political adages was "old age and treachery will always outdo youth and skill."

When I asked a Sacramento lobbyist if there were any good books on how the California legislature really worked, the only one he recommended was this one. It is telling -- though I suspect term limits, by making the legislators permanent amateurs has had an impact -- and it is entertaining. It is also disconcerting. It's clear that Willie Brown loves two things above all: power and Willie Brown. He says that, "When I was coming up, I wanted to be just like Phil Burton: ideologically committed and

superskillful at the game of acquiring and securing power." While my own political views overlap a good deal with his, I can't say that I feel the slightest camaraderie. There's not a half a sentence in this autobiography that indicates he ever troubled much about moral issues. He seems to have simply ran with whatever he picked up subconsciously. Indeed, for all his liberalism, there is definitely a streak of patriarchal brutality to him: he spends a chapter on how much he loves his family but then ends by casually mentioning that he made sure all the property was in his name and not his wife's so she couldn't do anything to embarrass him. Likewise, he expected unquestioning obedience from everyone below him, swiftly punishing (his word) those who displayed independence and expressing glee at the bad end of anyone who ever crossed him. A conservative reading this book would likely have the typical reaction people had to JR from the Dallas tv show in the 1980s: he's the man they love to hate. Brown reminds me of a local GOP operative I once interviewed. He was a nasty piece of work, but every Republican wanted to be his friend. They thought he could give them power, so they overlooked his sociopathic traits.

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