

The Vacationer

A Blistering Exposé Portraying George W. Bush as the Worst President Ever

Bush

Written by Jean Edward Smith

832 pages

\$35.00, Simon & Schuster, 2016

The simplicity of the title is as fitting as the “What, me worry?” Alfred E. Neuman – like photo that graces the cover. Smith’s masterful 800-page portrait of President George W. Bush is a must read for any thinking American seeking to understand just how and why we find ourselves today in a state of permanent war and deficit.

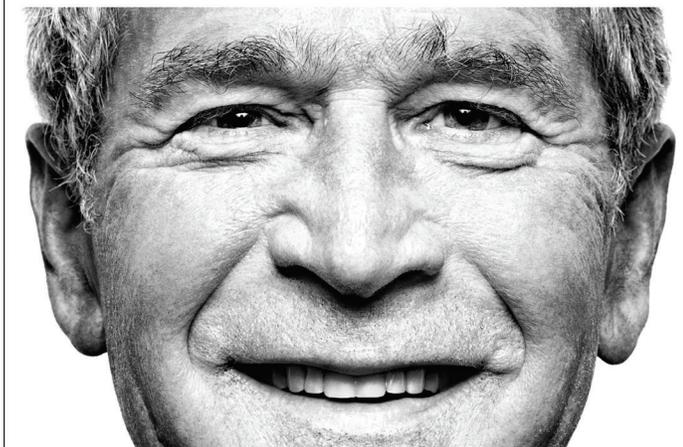
Smith unabashedly declares his work’s conclusion in its first stark sentence, “Rarely in the history of the United States has the nation been so ill-served as during the presidency of George W. Bush.”

Smith is a professional historian with excellent biographies of Eisenhower, FDR, Washington and John Marshall to his credit. Yet because he writes of a public figure of such recent vintage, few previously unearthed facts appear. As with all presidents, a true and relatively complete portrait cannot be painted for at least 12 years after their last day in office when historians can legally access some (but not all) pertinent original documents. Thousands of books had been written about Lincoln who had died 83 years before, but it was not until the July 26, 1947 opening of The Lincoln Papers to historians, via the Deed of Gift of Robert Todd Lincoln to the Library of Congress, that the world could truly appreciate The Great Emancipator.

Bush refused to grant an interview, for the author had written “George Bush’s War” (1992), a not so complimentary volume about his dad, President George H. W. Bush. Smith should consider it a mixed blessing. At least Bush did not

BUSH

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invade his country as payback.

The volume establishes without doubt that there is no way that Bush would ever have been elected to any office had he not been named Bush. At every stage of his life, he was given some special benefit solely because of his lineage that enabled him to advance his career and to avoid pitfalls faced by others.

Smith explains and evidences several troubling character traits of Bush that

are common to tyrants throughout history – religious certitude, stubbornness, inability to acknowledge error, favoring loyalty over expertise, deciding alone without consulting or considering options from those charged with responsibility, disdain for individual rights and rule of law, believing he is above the law and ends justify the means, acting unilaterally, insensitivity to consequences of his actions and

having no interest in or knowledge of history.

Bush often referred to himself as “The Decider” and even more often made important decisions on legal, political, military and diplomatic matters without informing or consulting the very key people he had appointed to inform and assist him in same. Like Reagan, he always included his loyal advisors in policy discussions on issues where they had zero experience or knowledge.

Bush actually merits the moniker “The Vacationer” as he was on vacation for more days (1,024) than any other president. Considering the damage he did while on the job, Smith implies that the nation and the world were better off with W. clearing brush in Crawford than “deciding” in the Oval Office.

The recounting Bush’s widespread and consistent undermining of the Rule of Law is equally troubling. Whether it is the selective firing mid-term for political purposes of eight U.S. Attorneys, the issuance of 157 “Signing Statements” wherein he stated he would sign, but not obey more than 1,100 laws as written, approval of a vast warrantless wiretap and search program, torture, “renditions” or going to war based on lies, W.’s abysmal record of abuse is one of Nixonian proportions.

As a perennial underachiever, Bush always had a smug disdain for intellectuals and experts, preferring to get guidance from some higher force and/or a small coterie of transplanted Texas sycophants. This willful blindness often led him down dangerous paths to foolish and disastrous decisions.

Bush apparently also had a knack for co-opting his own lawyers, including White House Counsel and ill-fated Supreme Court appointee Harriett Miers, lackluster Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez and pretty much the entire Office of Legal Counsel. And when he was finding it tough to sell his preemptive war sans evidence, Bush “suggested that the CIA could add some punch to the presentation if they brought in some lawyers who were accustomed to arguing cases before juries.” He was not interested in finding evidence, but only in selling his war.

Smith’s tale of Bush’s run up to war with Iraq is as astounding as it is a frightening tale of lies, deceit, messianic idiocy and abuse of power.

The author speaks volumes in one simple sentence, “George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq will likely go down in history as the worst foreign policy decision ever made by an American President.” Out of 44 in 227 years. Wow.

In 2000, the year he was “selected” (by the Supreme Court) President of the United States, even his father acknowledged that Bush knew virtually nothing of foreign affairs. His “Iron Triangle” of loyal Texans upon whom he relied also had no clue in this area. Though not one had ever served, these macho armchair warriors were eager to send others off to fight. Combining this with his religious certitude, he was ripe to be

molded and controlled by Dick (“Five Deferment”) Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and the neocons who audaciously called themselves “The Vulcans.”

Bush had zero interest in foreign affairs before 9/11, focusing instead on huge tax cuts for the wealthy. And his team ignored the many and serious CIA warnings of al Qaeda’s terrorist plans. And their focus was Iraq. Long before 9/11.

Bush was told by the CIA that al Qaeda (not Iraq) was responsible for 9/11, but before that fateful day was out he said this was “an opportunity” to “shake terror loose in places like... Iraq.” And “I don’t care what the international lawyers say, we are going to kick some ass.”

At the first meeting of his War Council on 9/12, Bush wanted to attack somebody, almost anybody, so Wolfowitz said, “What about Iraq?”

Bush’s eyes lit up. Saddam had plotted to kill his father and no one liked him, so, why not? And we all know that worked out so well.

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In just 55 riveting pages, Smith lays out in detail the astounding deception that was Bush’s run up to war with Iraq. Though he and Cheney hinted of a 9/11 connection when convenient, Bush’s stated reason for this preemptive war was to rid the world of Saddam and his weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Problem was, neither the CIA, UN Weapons Inspector Hans Blix and his 250-member Inspection Team, nor the International Atomic Energy Agency could find any credible evidence whatsoever that Saddam had WMDs. As O.J. is still looking for the “real killer,” Bush and the neocons are still looking for those WMDs.

What is uncanny is that Bush, Cheney and the neocons operated much like the radical Islamic zealots they vilify – both sides believe their mission is divinely inspired, act on faith, ignore reason and evidence, think the ends justify the means and that the law and fundamental rules of morality do not apply to them.

It is no coincidence that Bush so often referred to his “War on Terror” as a “Crusade.”

Although generally a blistering exposé, Smith’s volume does give kudos to W. where deserved for leadership fighting AIDS in Africa, noble attempts at immigration reform, new free trade agreements, No Child Left Behind, rescuing Wall Street and Detroit and improving ties with China. On balance, however, a careful reader can only conclude that the author throws in with the 61 percent of historians who think Bush was the worst President ever.

While the George W. Bush presidency had millions of victims, the greatest ones were truth, the rule of law and our honor. ■

M. Kelly Tillery (tilleryk@pepperlaw.com) is a partner in the Intellectual Property Department at Pepper Hamilton, LLP and a member of the Editorial Board of The Philadelphia Lawyer.