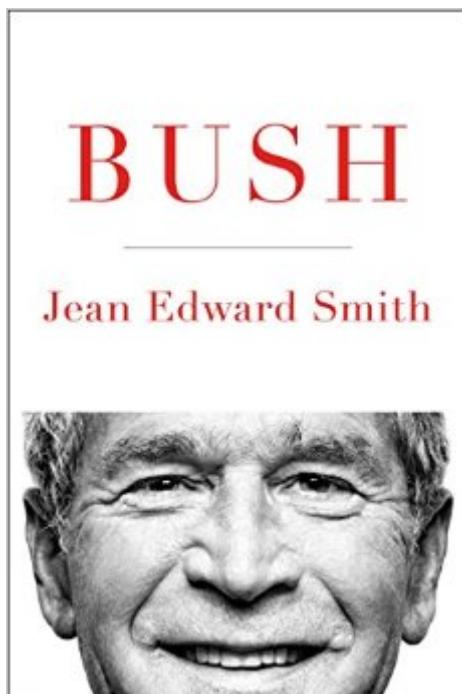


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Bush



Synopsis

Distinguished presidential biographer Jean Edward Smith offers a critical yet fair biography of George W. Bush, showing how he ignored his advisors to make key decisions himself "most disastrously in invading Iraq" and how these decisions were often driven by the President's deep religious faith. George W. Bush, the forty-third president of the United States, almost singlehandedly decided to invade Iraq. It was possibly the worst foreign-policy decision ever made by a president. The consequences dominated the Bush Administration and still haunt us today. In Bush, "America's greatest living biographer" (George Will), Jean Edward Smith, demonstrates that it was not Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, or Condoleezza Rice, but President Bush himself who took personal control of foreign policy. Bush drew on his deep religious conviction that important foreign-policy decisions were simply a matter of good versus evil. Domestically, he overreacted to 9/11 and endangered Americans' civil liberties. Smith explains that it wasn't until the financial crisis of 2008 that Bush finally accepted expert advice, something that the "Decider," as Bush called himself, had previously been unwilling to do. As a result, he authorized decisions that saved the economy from possible collapse, even though some of those decisions violated Bush's own political philosophy. Bush is a comprehensive evaluation of the Bush presidency "including Guantanamo, Katrina, No Child Left Behind, and other important topics" that will surely surprise many readers. Controversial, incisive, and compelling, it is thoroughly researched and sure to add to the debate over Bush's presidential legacy.

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Customer Reviews

Smith has written several excellent biographies of US Presidents, including Grant, FDR and Eisenhower. His take on Bush rings true, that of a fundamentally decent man who, sadly, suffered from a lack of many of the qualities that might have made him a successful President. How did he become President when, for the first 40 years of his life he had failed at almost everything he'd ever attempted? In Smith's telling, he got sober, found God and leveraged the Bush family name, Ivy League and Texas business connections (and, of course, lots of their money) to run for Governor of Texas. He had the good fortune to run against Ann Richards, an overwhelming favorite who didn't take him seriously until it was too late, and then do reasonably well in a governorship with little actual power. He managed to pass some beneficial legislation, particularly in the area of education reform. That positioned him for a run against Al Gore who ran one of the worst campaigns in US history and, after Elian Gonzales, butterfly ballots, who voters preferred having a beer with, Ralph Nader and recounts etc. well you know the rest. Smith saves his most withering analysis, rightly, for when Bush became President. Most damning, Bush and his administration (most notably Condi Rice) repeatedly ignored warnings of an impending terrorist attack on US soil. After 9/11 Bush, mostly unilaterally, made a series of disastrous decisions regarding military tribunals, torture, invading the one country in the infamous "Axis of Evil" without nuclear weapons capabilities and, very, very quickly, wasted the good will of America's allies. The FBI, CIA, Colin Powell and other rational, informed actors, who might have provided alternate strategies were not consulted.

Clearly there's controversy stirring of late regarding this book, and I have to admit that when I read it there were times when I was taken aback by the vehemence of the author and his opinion/feelings regarding Bush and this is the main reason I can't go with a five star review - I just have this feeling that something's a bit too personal in what's going on when a book is written in the way this one was. Will Inbolden in his 15 August review of the book in Foreign Policy magazine had many negative things to say and as an outsider I had to say that some of those things rang true for me. I think Smith was fixated on Bush's religiosity, but at the same time I'm also of a mind that this was a genuine weakness of Bush, he truly believed he was on God's mission and that is a legitimate point to make though Smith seems to have over reached a bit in this regard. You can read Inbolden's review in Foreign Policy and take that and the other reviews and the comments of other historians and come to your own conclusions. The Bush I see in this book was very much the Bush that I knew during his time as President. I think he was/is a decent man, but he was woefully lacking in the

qualities needed for him to be a great president. The Bush I knew:1. Was cocky to the point of hubris,2. Inclined to cowboy tendencies with his "I'm the decider" thinking that excluded input from people that one would hope would have kept him from making the mistakes that he did,3.

Jean Edward Smith is a prominent presidential and military biographer who has drawn very readable portraits of leaders like Ulysses Grant and Dwight Eisenhower. In this book he brings his pen and talent to bear on George W Bush. The biography is generally critical - often scathingly so - of Bush and Smith finds much to dislike in him. However he also gives credit where credit is due. Pros:- A solidly researched and executed biography. The writing flows well and the reader seldom feels bogged down, even after 800 pages. The attention to detail is often impressive and yet the style is never too wonkish.- Covers almost every major aspect of the Bush presidency, from the 2000 campaign to Bush vs Gore to 9/11, Katrina, Guantanamo and torture, stem cell research, the Patriot Act, No Child Left Behind, the prescription drug act and major combat decisions and miscalculations in Iraq and Afghanistan.- Bush's flaws are laid searingly bare: his early failures at almost every professional endeavor, his inexperience and lack of worldly wisdom, his propensity to depend on gut reaction instead of evidence-based reasoning, his gross black and white generalizations and rejection of nuance, his nebulous mixing of religious fervor and geopolitical strategy, his cheerful aversion to intellectuals and intellectual analysis, his tendency to surround himself with yes men and women, his dismissal of valid public opinion...the list goes on. It's hard to deny that many of these qualities encouraged the rise of the climate of intolerance, anti-intellectualism and lack of serious deliberation that we see today.

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