

DECISION POINTS



GEORGE W.
BUSH

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In this candid and gripping account, President George W. Bush describes the critical decisions that shaped his presidency and personal life.

George W. Bush served as president of the United States during eight of the most consequential years in American history. The decisions that reached his desk impacted people around the world and defined the times in which we live.

Decision Points brings readers inside the Texas governor's mansion on the night of the 2000 election, aboard Air Force One during the harrowing hours after the attacks of September 11, 2001, into the Situation Room moments before the start of the war in Iraq, and behind the scenes at the White House for many other historic presidential decisions.

For the first time, we learn President Bush's perspective and insights on:

His decision to quit drinking and the journey that led him to his Christian faith

The selection of the vice president, secretary of defense, secretary of state, Supreme Court justices, and other key officials

His relationships with his wife, daughters, and parents, including heartfelt letters between the president and his father on the eve of the Iraq War

His administration's counterterrorism programs, including the CIA's enhanced interrogations and the Terrorist Surveillance Program

Why the worst moment of the presidency was hearing accusations that race played a role in the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina, and a critical assessment of what he would have done differently during the crisis

His deep concern that Iraq could turn into a defeat costlier than Vietnam, and how he decided to defy public opinion by ordering the troop surge

His legislative achievements, including tax cuts and reforming education and Medicare, as well as his setbacks, including Social Security and immigration reform

The relationships he forged with other world leaders, including an honest assessment of those he did and didn't trust

Why the failure to bring Osama bin Laden to justice ranks as his biggest disappointment and why his success in denying the terrorists their fondest wish—attacking America again—is among his proudest achievements

A groundbreaking new brand of presidential memoir, *Decision Points* will captivate supporters, surprise critics, and change perspectives on eight remarkable years in American history—and on the man at the center

of events.

Decision Points Details

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From Reader Review Decision Points for online ebook

Julie Davis says

The Bush Presidential Library is literally 5 minutes from my house and we finally visited it on the Friday after Thanksgiving. That visit reminded me that I had this audiobook and it was time to give it a listen.

3 hours in, I've got to say that the simple, straight forward style is reminding me of "Yes, Chef" by Marcus Samuelsson. Neither author is an author by trade so the basic style highlights who they are in a vivid way.

I'm enjoying it a lot so far, especially the way that Bush will look back and take responsibility for a bad or misinformed decision. Though, to be fair, I am a fan so I'm already inclined to like this more than those who oppose his political stance.

Andrew says

After reading Tony Blair's political biography, I dove straight into read George Bush's "Decision Points."

Opponents ought to read the book in order to hear his side of things. Supporters ought to read it to get an inside look at the key decisions of his presidency. Those who loved him too much will be disappointed, and those who hated him probably won't bother picking up the book anyway (or might as well not, because they'll think what they want to whether or not they read it).

For the rest of us who agreed or disagreed with his decisions, we're treated to a series of brief vignettes followed by Bush's decision-making process, analysis, and retrospective evaluation.

I enjoyed reading about the decision-making process in particular, as there were decisions I wholeheartedly supported and some that I couldn't get behind at all. The book makes no excuses, and (like Blair) Bush is not afraid to say he's wrong or would do some things differently. What it accomplishes is to explain the context behind why each decision was made, and the process of how it was made.

The reader is left to his or her own conclusion, but the added dimension of his own perspective is helpful in better understanding why he did things in the way that they were done. The chief value of the book, for me, was that it cut behind the analysis, speculation and name-calling of the talking-heads, journalists, and politicians we heard from so regularly during those eight years. Bush's simple (but by no means simplistic - a lack of intelligence and a simple-minded worldview is a "Bush myth") language cuts right through all of that in order to tell it like he saw it, without anybody else explaining his motives for us.

Jeff says

My purpose in reading biographies and memoirs isn't to take a side on political issues, but rather to understand a little better how people think. From that perspective, I liked the book.

I had a few random takeaways:

- * I got the overall impression that Bush thinks his presidency will continue to look better in hindsight and that during his presidency too much politics/slinging took aim at him and strongly tarnished his perception.
- * 9/11 caught Bush (and most of the nation) by surprise and really forced a dramatic change in his presidency. When he visited NYC in the days that followed, I really think this had a huge impression on him, especially when he promised to avenge the horrible acts.
- * Bush gave the impression that he wanted act immediately to help Katrina victims but didn't have legal authority to do so (e.g. allow federal troops to patrol the state area) because the governor kept refusing to give that authority. He was eventually able to send in troops without the authority to patrol/engage/fire-a-shot-if-necessary and this helped. Had he known that it would have gone so well without needing the governor's approval he would have done it sooner.
- * Bush believes that the No Child Left Behind policy is extremely important as a social/ethnic justice issue.
- * I think President Bush's Christian faith is sincere
- * I honestly think Bush tried to do what he thought was best for the country without sinister plans.
- * Bush calls his mom (Barbara) "mother." I thought this was... unique.

On a lighter note, I listened to the audio edition of this book read by Bush himself. It added extra flair to the experience. Bush has a noticeably different/slower reading voice than his normal speaking/non-speech voice. This reading voice causes him to e-nun-ci-ate words more (e.g. "juuu-liiiie" for "July"). This at times made it amusing to listen to, even at very serious points in the book. For example, when Bush talks about how special ops caught Saddam and then the FBI interrogated him, he said this (imagine Bush reading it slowly, but with a "WHAT WERE YOU THINKING SADDAM?!" vocal tone):

"[Saddam] told agents that he was more worried about looking weak to Iran than being removed by the coalition. He never thought the United States would follow through on our promises to disarm him by force. I'm not sure what more I could have done to show Saddam I meant what I said. I named him part of an axis of evil in my State of the Union address. I spoke to a packed chamber of the United Nations and promised to disarm him by force if diplomacy failed. We presented him with a unanimous Security Council resolution. We sought and received strong bipartisan backing from the U.S. Congress. We deployed 150,000 troops to his border. I gave him a final forty-eight-hours' notice that we were about to invade his country. How much clearer could I have been?"

All told, a short and interesting book.

Kathryn says

The biggest problem with *Decision Points* is that the people who most need to read it never will.

In this memoir of his presidency, President George W. Bush works thematically (not chronologically) through the major decision points he faced over eight years; obviously, the War on Terror plays a pivotal role, but he also discusses domestic events such as Katrina and his efforts to reform Social Security.

Like anyone else, I had my disagreements with the President (is there anyone with whom you agree 100% on everything? Really?), but I grant him the benefit of the doubt in assuming that he acted as he thought best (and, of course, the President always has access to much more complete information than civilians without security clearances!). *Decision Points* does a good job of elucidating President Bush's thought process. Some

information is still classified, I'm sure, but he does describe the major factors contributing to his decisions.

I recommend *Decision Points* for people who want to understand more about the former president's decisions and who are willing to read his words with an open mind.

Adrian Carpio says

Although not a fan of his politics, I was taken aback at the frankness of the president's memoir. Did this book make him seem more human? Yes. Did it change my mind about some of his policies? No but he does present some interesting points.

Besides this being a book about his decisions on Iraq and Afghanistan, I was surprised at how important his decisions on aid to Africa and developing countries were to him. I honestly don't remember reading much about these decisions when he was president. Some times the media has its head up its ass. Who's kidding who? The media always has its head up its ass. That's why when we turn on the TV we see some "intrepid" reporter in front of a Best Buy at 11pm interviewing some dumb fucks who have been camped out in front of the store since the previous day because they MUST HAVE the 42" LCD TV when the store opens at 5am.

I swear, if I had the balls, I would go with Iris to Africa and help out all those people Bush mentioned in his book. Honestly, it was inspiring. Alas, I don't have cojones, as the president is fond of saying.

I suggest everyone pick up this book. Read it. Judge for yourself.

Leesa says

I am currently listening to this on CD with my 11 year old son while we drive to and from school. First I have to disclose that I am a major fan of this president and all the morals he stands for. I am very sad that our country does not give him praise for how he kept us safe. Sure as a conservative I did not always support his spending policies but otherwise I truly admire his compassion, leadership and faith. This book is very good and I am so pleased to hear in his words answer his critics and my son and I discuss a lot about the history of his Presidency and his faith journey. This a power piece of history and story that touches my son and I. An excellent journey of learning for us both. We are thru disc two. We have finished Disc three now on 2/14(will comment on this soon). We have finished DISC 5 2/18 and I will update soon.

Finally finished and the best thing about reading this book is that he answers his critics and does it with intelligence and grace. I enjoyed his analysis of Hurricane Katrina. In listening to this book on CD I really got to know this man and all the decency and courage he brought to the office. I am proud he was my President.

Kellie says

"timeliness is important to make sure an organization does not get sloppy"

This was a fascinating book. Politics aside, I thought this was a well written, honest depiction of Bush 43's

time in office. If you think about all that happened during W's 2 terms, 9/11, Afghanistan and Iraq wars, Hurricane Katrina and the financial crisis, to name a few, it was not an easy 8 years.

I appreciate W's honesty. He admits there were some decisions he made that were wrong. However, he explains in detail, why he made some of the decisions he did. He made them with the fate of the American people in mind. It is interesting to hear his point of view, his side of the story, when the press or other politicians had communicated something totally different.

George W Bush is a man of faith. He is very interested in talking to people, getting their point of view. He wrote letters to over 5,000 families who lost love ones in the war. He invited several of them to the White House. He respects the office of the President and felt honored to have served.

Bush had some interesting opinions of the various leaders and political figures he was in contact with. He is not afraid to express disappointment with some Republican leaders, US allies or popular celebrity figures, as well as, praise Democratic leaders, and other people who publicly did not support him. To me, that shows a lot of character.

I recommend this book to anyone who is interested to learn about the years 2001-2009 from his prospective. You do not have to agree with him. You do not have to be a Republican. Just open your mind and re-live some recent history, you will not be disappointed.

Suzanne says

"I have done my best to write about the decisions I got right, those I got wrong, and what I would do differently if given the chance. Of course, in the presidency, there are no do-overs. You have to do what you believe is right and accept the consequences. I tried to do that every day of my eight years in office. Serving as president was the honor of a lifetime, and I appreciate your giving me an opportunity to share my story."

Having read a number of political autobiographies, the first thing that struck me about George Bush's book was the refreshing layout of the book. The idea of structuring a book about one's life, in any form other than a complete chronological history, was very appealing. Hillary Clinton's book ended up being mind-numbingly boring because it was filled will so much minutia. Bush's book, on the other hand, was chaptered into major decisions that affected his life and his presidency.

"In December 1999, I attended a Republican debate in Des Moines. The moderators were Tom Brokaw of NBC and a local anchor, John Bachman. After covering some predictable topics, Bachman let loose a surprise: 'What political philosopher do you most identify with and why?'"

One of the areas that interested me in the Bush Presidency was his faith. When posed the above question, Bush answered "Christ, because he changed my heart." While critics charged that he used religion to get votes, I believe President Bush was sincere about his faith. He clearly used his faith value of human dignity to guide him in his decision not to allow scientists to pursue stem cell research by destroying human embryos. As he stated in his chapter on Stem Cells "I have faith, as I did when I announced my stem cell decision in 2001, that science and ethics can coexist."

"I worried that the intense focus on climate change would cause nations to overlook the desperate immediate needs in the developing world. 'If world leaders are going to sit around talking about something

that might be a problem fifty years from now,’ I told Angela [Merkel], ‘we’d better do something about the people dying from AIDS and malaria right now.’”

Nowhere was our President’s faith and compassion more evident than his commitment to alleviate the suffering from AIDS in Africa. From a mere \$500 million, President Bush instituted a smart and highly effective program to get the continent back on its feet. He managed to secure \$30 billion from Congress for this effort, a matching \$30 billion from the international community, and the G-8 canceled more than \$34 billion in debt from poor African countries. Today, more than 24 million African lives have been saved through these efforts. AIDS is no longer considered a death sentence in Africa. President Bush surely deserves the Nobel Peace Prize for this amazing humanitarian success. The prize the Americans received was the good will of the African people and a huge inoculation against terrorist infiltration among African nations.

“As I took my seat next to Laura, Dad reached over and gently squeezed my arm. Some have said the moment marked a symbolic passing of the torch from one generation to another. I saw it as the reassuring touch of a father who knew the challenges of war. I drew strength from his example and his love. I needed that strength for the next stage of the journey: the visit to the point of attack, lower Manhattan.”

Nowhere in his presidency was the benefit of his leadership more evident than 9-11. Prior to this day, President Bush had selected a cabinet based on skill and expertise, not on cronyism. This wise move was just one example of the strengths of this President. He also understood that because of 9/11, the number one goal of his Presidency was to keep our country safe.

Obviously time will tell how the world will view his Presidency, but I have always believed that much of the criticism about George W. Bush came from a political machine that seeks to gain credibility by discrediting their political opponent. Our country suffers when that happens. President Bush sought to shore up Social Security, but the Congressional leadership instructed Democrats not to work with President on this issue. We’ll all ended up paying for their selfishness.

Finally, I have a great amount of respect for a man that can admit his mistakes. In Decision Points, President Bush makes clear areas where he felt he had made the wrong decision, or wondered whether there was a better decision. His humility is uncommon in today’s leaders and I find it gives him an air of wisdom and nobility.

While no book is perfect or complete, I really enjoyed Decision Points. I have always liked President Bush, and the book made me even more appreciative of his leadership for our country.

Suzanne says

Update: Loved every minute. Even when I was in fierce disagreement it was fascinating to watch the decisions unfold. And what a gift to read about the important events of my lifetime from such an inside angle.

I really opposed TARP. I didn't understand how someone supposedly committed to free market principles could have pushed so hard for this huge government overreach. To read his explanation made me reconsider my harsh judgment of his decision. Probably because one of the few things I value more than capitalism is the peaceful transition of power that regularly occurs in this country. It never fails to amaze me that no

matter how rancorous the fight all parties eventually allow it to end peacefully. This is not historically indicated to be the norm. If TARP was necessary to ensure the continued tradition of peaceful transition of power AND government can unwind itself from the industries around which it has currently wrapped itself, it may have been the right decision.

If you suffer from Bush Derangement Syndrome, don't bother with the book. Most of you seem fairly incapable of reasonable discourse on the topic. If you are a conservative/libertarian with serious issues with the administration take this out for a spin. You won't be wasting your time.

****Fantastic. Presidential autobiography may be my new obsession. Reading about his cabinet selection was like watching a season of "Dallas" - good and good for you. The format is interesting. Each chapter represents one decision or group of related decisions and how he arrived to that decision and the impact of it. It is not chronological which is actually better because it forces you to focus more on dates in order to better track when things are happening. His writing style is plain and direct, as expected, but is not found lacking. I'm still waiting to read how someone who espouses such conservative views enlarged government as much as he did but other than that I'm delighted with this book.

Brandon says

It's obvious that President Bush wants to preserve and shape his legacy through this book, and I think he does an effective job. The book is structured as a revisit to some of the major--and controversial--decisions he made during his presidency. He seeks to clarify his thinking and explain what went on behind the scenes. It was enlightening to me to hear more about why he did what he did. President Bush obviously wasn't a stupid, bumbling man as portrayed by his detractors, and I personally think he truly believed what he was doing was right and good for America. To his credit, he freely admits his mistakes as well has his successes. Overall a great and enlightening read.

Jo says

Admission: I lean middle left politically, did not vote for GW Bush, and did not like him during his presidency. After reading this book I found I liked the man (although not all of his decisions) and respected him more (although not all of his decisions), and found that he was more intelligent than had been my previous impression.

This book is a interesting and enlightening reflection by President Bush (43) on his perception of his life, his decisions, and his actions. It is not a great literary work – he writes like he speaks, and that makes the book very accessible. The book covers a critical time period in our history and I learned interesting behind the scenes tidbits I had not known before. Bush explains in detail why he made certain decisions, and surprisingly, owned up to some bad/wrong decisions, and some things that could have been done better. He does not give a blow-by-blow, day-to-day account of his presidency. Some of the topics he covers include his early drinking problems & decision to quit, the 2000 election, 9/11, the decisions to go into Afghanistan and Iraq, the surge in 2007-2008, his crusade to provide aid (health care) to Africa, Hurricane Katrina, and the efforts to avoid another depression in 2008. He does not address all of the decisions in his presidency, nor even all of the major ones. (I would've like to have learned what was behind his energy and environment decisions, but they weren't addressed.)

It was enlightening to read of his decision making processes in each case. They were more intelligent and practical than I expected – although I still believe he started from false premises & assumptions and did not make sufficient inquiry into some, such as the invasion of Iraq and I believe that he did not sufficiently plan for the aftermath of the war in that country (...and I think this book supports my opinions in this area. I really don't like his use of speculative thinking to support/justify his decision to invade.) I also was not fond of the extent to which he blamed the Gov of LA for problems in responding to Katrina. But I do understand better why he made the decisions he did, and found it refreshing that he admitted mistakes and bad decisions. I admire his decision to press for greater aid to Africa, and the reason behind those decisions. I knew about it at the time but seeing it all together in one chapter heightened the impact and my respect.

Bush's faith also permeates the book. I like how he spoke of it and acknowledged that it is central in his life, without becoming maudlin or overly effusive about it. I was surprised by the lack of rancor or bitterness towards those of us who derided him.

Whether or not you liked President GW Bush, it is definitely a good read if you like history!

J says

It was not a fast read! Each chapter took a while to get through and seemed to encourage pondering.

As a longtime supporter of Bush, I was surprised to find I disagreed with some of his decisions. Yet, overall, I was encouraged by his prayerful, honest approach to the decisions that faced him as president. Reading his book motivated me to think about the decisions in my life and my approach to them. It encouraged me to be a better person. I felt the responsibility he felt and I appreciated his humbleness in admitting mistakes. He seemed like a guy I'd like to know personally and someone I would trust to run our country.

I also loved getting the inside view of world politics through Bush's eyes. To hear his opinions and assessments of other politicians and world leaders. To see how and when issues were brought to him. And, to get a better sense of who he is/was as a person.

It is odd now that time has passed to remember the hurtful (and untrue) things people said about Bush when he was president. Perhaps now that we've all experienced the "hope" of Obama, we can appreciate what we had. And pick a good president next time around.

Joe Martin says

When I read political memoirs, I'm typically looking for one of two things: a much better understanding of the politician or a much better understanding of the decisions that were made and the day-to-day, nitty-gritty detail of events that led into the decisions. Sadly, with this book from "43", I got neither.

President Bush had an active presidency and was often juggling many simultaneous crises. I was hoping for a look at what life was like in his White House. How crazy *does* a typical day look when you're juggling a Social Security reform bill, a war in Iraq, and a belligerent North Korean state all at once? Sadly, I never found out. By organizing the point around different topics and focusing on one decision point at a time, he stripped events from their context, rendering them sterile and unmoored from the emotions of each year of

his presidency.

I was also greatly disappointed by the lack of detail surrounding each decision point. Many of the descriptions boiled down to a very simple formula. "An event happened. I had a gut feeling but knew I needed to consult with some trusted advisors. My advisors confirmed my gut instinct and I implemented the plan. Ultimately, I was disappointed in the outcome and I know realize that I should have changed my tactics (but not the overall plan). Today, America is better off and I'm glad I made the attempt, even if it didn't turn out quite the way I'd hoped it would."

I wish I could say that I exaggerate and that there is a higher level of detail in the book. I can't. The Harriet Miers debacle, for instance, only takes about a page to relate. I've watched the West Wing. I know that a huge amount of work goes into the selection of a Supreme Court Justice. Going into the book, I wanted to know a lot more about the process that led to picking Ms. Miers as a nominee. This book did nothing to satisfy my curiosity.

People who already love President George W. Bush will probably love this book. Those of us who read it hoping to find a reason to reevaluate his presidency will have to go away disappointed.

Jeremy says

Love him or hate him, this book is worth reading.

Bush seems to have been vindicated in several areas that were controversial during his presidency, especially stem cell research and the surge in Iraq. There are other areas for which he takes responsibility, including public perception of the Katrina response and the failure of immigration reform. He seems to have done some honest soul searching for things he could have done differently if he had them to do over again. He does a lot more explaining than justifying, meaning he sticks to his guns when he thinks he's right and admits failure when he thinks he wasn't.

This book is extremely serious at times, but also has some solidly humorous bits and interesting anecdotes. Apparently when Vlad Putin was showing off his dog to W, he said that his dog was bigger, stronger, and faster than W's dog Barney. When W told this story to Prime Minister Harper of Canada, Mr. Harper said, "You're lucky he only showed you his dog."

I was none too impressed with the chapter on the financial crisis. It was quite a disappointment that after being willing to take on something as unpopular as Social Security reform he would turn around and cave to legacy pressures by bailing out the banks and auto companies. It's clear he just didn't want the house of cards to fall on his watch. He kicked the can down the road and he knew it.

As an aside, I love how easy it is for people to obfuscate when talking about economics. Let's take the sentences below for example. I'm going to replace the words purchasing equity with giving money, and the world capital with money, in order to demonstrate the utter tautology of the message:

Original:

"Purchasing equity would inject capital – the lifeblood of finance – directly into the undercapitalized banking system. That would reduce the risk of sudden failure and free up more money for banks to lend."

Amended:

“Giving money would inject money – the lifeblood of finance – directly into the under-moneyed banking system. That would reduce the risk of sudden failure and free up more money for banks to lend.”

See? Had he not used all the fancy jargon, you might not have realized how difficult it is to understand that if you give banks money, they will have more money. Never mind where the money is coming from or if there are any better uses for it. Banks need money, see? Or else... they won't have money.

Quotes:

In March 2002... the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) mailed a letter notifying a Florida flight school that it had granted student visas to Mohamed Atta and Marwan al Shehhi. The person opening the letter must have been shocked. Those were the two pilots who had flown airplanes into the Twin Towers on 9/11.

That is the nature of the presidency. Perceptions are shaped by the clarity of hindsight. In the moment of decision, you don't have that advantage.

After the Cold War, the United States gave up on Afghanistan. The result was chaos, civil war, the Taliban takeover, sanctuary for al Qaeda, and the nightmare of 9/11. To forget that lesson would be a dreadful mistake.

“The hard fact is that so long as Saddam remains in power, he threatens the well-being of his people, the peace of his region, the security of the world... Heavy as they are, the costs of action must be weighed against the price of inaction... Saddam will strike again at his neighbors. He will make war on his own people. And mark my words, he will develop weapons of mass destruction. He will deploy them, and he will use them.” Bill Clinton (1998)

The Middle East was the center of a global ideological struggle. On one side were decent people who wanted to live in dignity and peace. On the other were extremists who sought to impose their radical views through violence and intimidation.

Whenever I heard someone claim that we had rushed to war, I thought back to this period. It had been more than a decade since the Gulf War resolutions had demanded that Saddam disarm, over four years since he had kicked out the weapons inspectors, six months since I had issued my ultimatum at the UN, four months since Resolution 1441 had given Saddam his “final opportunity,” and three months past the deadline to fully disclose his WMD. Diplomacy did not feel rushed. It felt like it was taking forever.

President Shuster [of Slovakia] had tears in his eyes as he described his nation's pride in helping liberate Iraq. I kept that moment in mind when I heard critics allege that America acted unilaterally. The false charge denigrated our allies and pissed me off.

If I wanted to mislead the country into war, why would I pick an allegation that was certain to be disproven [sic] publicly shortly after we invaded the country?... Nobody was lying. We were all wrong.

By the time I left office, fourth- and eighth-grade math scores had reached their highest levels in history. So had fourth-grade reading scores. Hispanic and African American students set new records in multiple categories. The gap had narrowed in exactly the way we wanted: All students improved, but minority

students improved the most.

Social Security's return [is] 1.2 percent.

Social Security was especially unfair to African Americans. Because their life expectancy was shorter, black workers who spent a lifetime paying into Social Security received an average of \$21,000 less in benefits than whites of comparable income levels.

In the five years since I proposed reform, the Social Security crisis has grown more acute. The projected bankruptcy date has moved from 2042 to 2037. The shortfall in Social Security – the cost of fixing the problem – has grown more than \$2 trillion since I raised the issue in 2005. That is more than we spent on the war in Iraq, Medicare modernization, and the Troubled Asset Relief Program combined. For anyone concerned about the deficits facing future generations, the failure to reform Social Security ranks among the most expensive missed opportunities of modern times.

According to one study, the benefits of trade are four times more effective in reducing poverty than foreign aid. When I took office, America had free trade agreements in place with three countries... By the time I left, we had agreements with seventeen.

“For us, the most important thing is, let [Obama] be as good a friend of Africa as President Bush has been.”
President Kikwete of Tanzania

“I now know he’s sincere about wanting freedom for the Iraqis... I know he’s sorry and feels some pain for our loss. And I know he’s a man of faith.” Cindy Sheehan (2004), founder of Code Pink

If anything, the consequences of defeat in Iraq would be even worse than in Vietnam. We would leave al Qaeda with a safe haven in a country with vast oil reserves. We would embolden a hostile Iran in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. We would shatter the hopes of people taking risks for freedom across the Middle East. Ultimately, our enemies could use their sanctuary to attack our homeland.

“This war is lost, the surge is not accomplishing anything.” Harry Reid (2007)

Critics charged that the freedom agenda was a way for America to impose our values on others. But freedom is not an American value; it is a universal value. Freedom cannot be imposed; it must be chosen. And when people are given the choice, they choose freedom.

“I was cynical about Iraq. But when I saw the Iraqi people voting three weeks ago, eight million of them, it was the start of a new Arab world. The Syrian people, the Egyptian people, all say that something is changing. The Berlin Wall has fallen. We can see it.” Walid Jumblatt, Lebanese political leader

“I read the Bible, but I don’t trust what it says.” President Jiang Zemin of China

The unemployment rate... averaged 5.3 percent during my presidency, lower than the averages of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Amy says

Whether one is a fan of Bush and/or of his politics, this book is an interesting read. So many of the reviews I read (more than a dozen, at least) lacked focus on the book itself and instead devolved into Bush-bashing (ranging from explicit attacks to the more "polite" condescension of the NYT). The book itself is well-written, insightful, and, in many of the familial anecdotes--it is laugh-out-loud funny. (For example, who knew that Barbara Bush the elder was such a card? Not me.)

Many people (most people I know, quite honestly!) will not read this book. They will continue to make original jokes such as "he wrote a book, but he can't even read"--which a woman said to me while I was reading at Starbucks. But, for any student of history and/or one with interestcurrent events, I think this is a worthwhile read. It clearly explains many of the key decisions for which Bush was maligned (particularly in his second term) and while it might not change any minds, it definitely provides explanation.

Brian says

Regardless of whether you like him or not, he presided over one of the roughest times in american history. This book will make you laugh, probably frustrate you, and it may even make your eyes well up with tears.

President Bush has a unique perspective that only one other person has had, that is being the son of a former president, he has been involved with the workings of this country for a long time and because of that this book offers great insight, comical stories, gripping eye witness accounts of world wide happenings with a door to a President that one could argue stands alone with all he faced.

The chapters are broken down into the major points of his presidency. He goes into a fair amount of detail involving his thinking during the trying times of 9/11 and the wars, he admits to mistakes on one hand and then shows his stubbornness on the other. Katrina was a big surprise for me, I was surprised by many details I was unaware of, and why he did what he did.

I've always admired him on a personal level, but I felt he really lost touch with the constitution in many areas, I felt while reading this that he looked at tax dollars as his own bank roll. In the end this is a book not to be missed. If you hated him you may find reason to change your mind, if you liked or loved him this will cement those feelings forever.

Chapters include: Quiting Drinking,Running for office, Personnel decisions, Stem Cells, 9/11, Both Wars, Leadership, Katrina, AIDS, The Surge in Iraq, Focus on Freedom, The Financial Crisis.

Elizabeth Sulzby says

I read this book because I wanted to know how Bush would defend himself and his administration. My answer about half way through and having skimmed the rest is: "Not well at all." (I have now read it entirely and reread specific parts and my comment still stands.) He doesn't seem to understand the events of his presidency, the repercussions of his actions, and the source-based historical books (and articles) about his presidency. I am reading with a "sick in the stomach, this truly can't have been written by a President," reaction. I cannot shelve this as history and, oddly enough, it's not even diatribe. He just writes as if he were president of the class and would do anything his buds wanted him to do.

Thanks to all the writers who have tried to keep our democracy alive during those 8 years.

Things I do appreciate about the book are some of the smaller chapters, such as Bush's efforts for HIV/AIDS. But he does not evaluate this very good and, I think, probably honest effort, alongside his attacks on women's right to choose and with refusing to allow our medical aid to women in foreign countries receiving our aid to be counselled on abortion.

Reading this book led me back to reading such as Richard Clarke's books and other investigative journalism during the early years of Bush's presidency. I contrasted Clarke's description of trying to get the Bush administration to attend to the imminent threats by Bin Laden (that Clinton had alerted him to), the events in the White House and bunker during 9-11 itself, and the push to attack Iraq which preceded 9-11 and quickly overtook the efforts in Afghanistan. The new book that I am currently reading and recommend to others interested in these times is Hubris by Isikoff and Corn. I was aware that Valerie Phlame Wilson was a NOC and what personal safety those non covered agents (and their sources) gave up. I did not know that she was the head agent in charge of on the ground investigations of mass destruction, yet she was not consulted during the build-up to Iraq. Many sources have reported the "stovepiping" of evidence in favor of attacking Iraq, but Hubris sets out the deliberate omission of the CIA's program on WMD and the substitution of analysts searching out the kind of evidence Bush and esp. Cheney wanted to go to war.

Bush writes about his care and concern for the troops and their families and I believe that he speaks truthfully from his concern (and, whether he is consciously aware of it or not, his guilt) about the troops and Afghan/Iraq civilians who lost their lives. He seems to have put that concern in a box and have isolated it from his "decision points."

On a personal level, when I saw and heard him on television at the start of his book tour, I felt very sorry for him. He looks so aged and beaten down. I think Americans, myself included, have a tendency to give former Presidents credit for their good actions and to down-play their harmful ones. In the case of Bush, I think we cannot afford to take his account of his presidency in isolation of other accounts.

Glenn Gargiulo says

I do not think Bush was best President. However realistically to blame the problems this country has endured in the past few years on one man is crazy and really shows the simple minded attitude too many Americans have. You spent more money than you had and now it has caught up to you. Take responsibility for yourself. I do not think Bush handled many things very well in his time in office, but then again given the situations and the information available at the time, I don't know that many could have done much better.

As a book I like it. It is easy to read and written in a more modern style. He agrees he wasn't always right in his decisions. All in all he doesn't try to "Make excuses" like some have written on your reviews, but then again I don't half of the people who gave this book bad reviews even read it. Keep jumping on the I hate Bush band wagon with no idea why other than you are against the war.

Mare S says

I freely admit that I come at this book as a bleeding heart liberal who never thought much of President George W. Bush and his capabilities. I borrowed this book from the library - because yeah, wasn't going to pay for it - as I was curious to read his take on certain situations. I went into it fully expecting to feel annoyed with things and biased against his politics. I didn't expect it to be so very boring. It took me a whole week to get through fifty pages before I finally started skimming to the parts that I was curious about.

This book is like President Bush when he went off script during press conferences. If it weren't so boring, it might rate as a train wreck. I will say that a few of the clips that were sensationalized were completely taken out of text - his mother didn't make him stare at her miscarried child so much as needed someone to drive her to the hospital - but the Kanye West thing? Very true. And so anger-making. He was president when 9/11 happened (no, I don't think he was responsible, but it still happened). He was president during two wars and whether he believed in them or not, men and women lost their lives during these wars. And the worst moment of his presidency was when Kanye West called him a racist?

There really was no new information or understanding provided. Just so damn boring. I think the only way it could only be worse would be to have it narrated to me by George W. Bush.

Jason says

This may be one of the most difficult reviews I've ever attempted to write. Being as opinionated about politics as I am, I'm very tempted to launch into my opinions on various political matters covered in this book. However, once I start down the dark path, forever will it dominate my discourse, so I'm going to try my best not to go there. I was originally going to go through each chapter and state whether or not I agree with the decisions he made, and why, and what's wrong with the world today, and what was wrong then, and yadda, yadda, yadda. However, I'm pretty confident that not one among you cares what I think about these past events. So... Here goes my attempt at an objective review without political commentary.

...taking deep breaths...

Firstly, I'm a Bush fan. Always have been, and I supported and defended him right up through the end of presidency when even his own party was fleeing like lemmings from the man. I never let his lack of prowess with speaking the English language serve as a measuring mark of his intelligence. I readily admit that his speaking ability leaves much to be desired, and I must confess that his writing style is also not above reproach. Having endured eight years of his speeches, this is not surprising. His writing style is reminiscent of those speeches. I thought that was going to be distracting since I'm not a fan of it, but it wasn't. I could easily hear his voice as I read, and that worked in the book's favor since it *is* his memoir. If it had been a novel, it probably would've driven me crazy.

Since he was so severely lampooned in the media as an idiot, and he also has a somewhat self-deprecating sense of humor, I was disappointed that he didn't add a couple of coloring and activity pages to the book; they would have been a nice touch. Also, being thought of as a moron may have worked in his favor as it caused people to "misunderestimate" him often. Many felt that Bush was Cheney's puppet. I've never believed that, and this book makes it pretty clear that Bush was in charge and had the final word.

I really liked the way this book was laid out. I usually like my history lined up chronologically, but the topical set up actually works very well since many of the topics covered spanned many years of the presidency. The first that come to mind for almost anyone are the Iraqi and Afghani wars, but his work for

AIDS relief in Africa, and the Freedom Agenda (promoting democracy throughout the world) also span several years. The topics that didn't span over several years of his presidency, such as Katrina, the financial crisis in late 2008, and the decision to implement a troop surge in Iraq in 2006, also work well in this topical format. He didn't cover every decision, and lists several that he bypassed in the afterword, but it certainly wasn't because he shied away from the more controversial ones. He covers all of the most contentious issues.

One thing I was glad to see in this book was Bush defending himself against critics, which is something he rarely did while he was in office. Others would defend him, but I hardly recall him doing it for himself. This made it look like he didn't believe he could, but I always believed there was a method behind some of his madness, and he explains the methodology in the book. Some decisions that completely baffled me when he made them are now much clearer. I'm not sure why he didn't explain them more thoroughly when he made them, but perhaps he thought there was no point since haters are gonna hate. Boy, do I know how true that is since I do some pretty hardcore hating on the other team, and at certain times there is no explanation good enough to justify their behavior to me.

Allow me to use an analogy of wolves and sheep from that great movie *Babe* to exemplify. There comes a part in the movie where a dog (which is called a "wolf" by the sheep) must speak to the sheep. She "decided to speak very slowly, for it was a cold fact of nature that sheep were stupid, and there was nothing that could convince her otherwise." When the sheep replied, they "decided to speak very slowly, for it was a cold fact of nature that wolves were ignorant, and there was nothing that could convince them otherwise." This is how many Republicans and Democrats view each other, and I certainly wear the description very well.

OK, back to the book. Here's a case in point that Bush couldn't win for trying. No matter what move he made, it was going to be vilified by everybody. But, such is the bane of the presidency, regardless of who is occupying the Oval Office. Uganda had been working on their AIDS epidemic before we got involved with sending money, education, medicine, etc. The Ugandans "employed an aggressive prevention campaign known as ABC: Abstinence, Be faithful, or else use a Condom." It was a successful campaign that was showing good results. When Bush announced that we were going to help the Africans deal with AIDS, it went over pretty well. However, "as expected, there were some objections. The biggest came in response to the ABC prevention strategy. Critics on the left denounced the abstinence component as an ideological 'war on condoms' that would prove unrealistic and ineffective. I pointed out that abstinence worked every time. Some on the right objected to distributing condoms, which they felt would encourage promiscuity... Ironically, both sides charged that we were imposing our values - religious fundamentalism if you asked one camp, sexual permissiveness if you asked the other. Neither argument made much sense to me since the ABC strategy had been developed in Africa, implemented in Africa, and successful in Africa."

I found the book to be rather inspiring. Here is a man who had values and principles and stuck to them to the best of his ability. Sometimes he went against what almost everyone else wanted him to do, such as the troop surge in Iraq. A couple of times he compromised those principles, such as with the bailout in 2008, yet did it because he considered it to be the lesser of two evils. He was, and still seems to be, quite in favor of the free market. (Must... resist temptation... to voice opinions... and assign blame... Breathe in... out... in... out... Stick to the book...)

OK, I'm back. Here's a quote relating to the last paragraph. "I was furious the (financial) situation had reached this point. A relatively small group of people - many on Wall Street, some not - had gambled that the housing market would keep booming forever. It didn't. In a normal environment, the free market would render its judgment and they could fail. I would have been happy to let them do so. But this was not a normal environment." He goes on to state how economists predicted a second great depression if certain firms failed, and he compromised his value for the greater good. I don't know if I could have done that.

At any rate, we learn a lot about the man himself with this book. He freely admits that he made some mistakes, and points out several of them. He steadfastly defends some of his decisions which were unpopular, and I can honestly say that I can see where he is coming from with every one of them, even the Harriet Miers nomination for Supreme Court Justice which caused me to employ a face-palm when I heard it, and I'd like to think I still wouldn't have done it, no matter HOW good I thought she might have been at the job.

Obviously Bush didn't get along with everybody he came in contact with, but he handles the descriptions of those people with humility and dignity. There is very little blaming and finger pointing in the book, and he sticks to talking about his side of the street mostly. Like I said before, I found the book inspiring, and I kind of hope I can handle myself with as much decorum as Bush did/does. He does point out where he feels like he was treated unfairly, but it never comes across as whiny, and he always says why he thought it was unfair. (See the ABC example from a few paragraphs above).

Another thing I liked about this book is that it has Barbara Bush in it, and I love her (the mother, not the daughter). She has great one liners, and there are examples of that peppered throughout. I also like it when she jacks him up every now and then.

If you're as hot-headed about politics as I am and find it to be a serenity black-hole (which I dive into head first all too frequently knowing full well that it's only going to piss me off... maybe I'll learn one day and leave it alone), then you are either going to love this book, or it will send you spiraling into rage. If you can look at the issues discussed without getting bent around the axle, and have an interest in those issues, then you would probably like this book. If you want to read about a man of high moral fiber who sticks to his guns, then you'd also like this book. If you're looking for great prose, then what the hell are you doing even reading this review? That's like going to a Michael Bay movie for the plot; why would you expect there to be one that makes sense? I suggest you leave this book alone if that's your motive.
