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John Robert Greene. *The Presidency of George Bush.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000. ix + 245 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-0993-2.

Reviewed by Steven Wagner (Social Science Division, Missouri Southern State College)

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George Bush: A Guardian President

In this latest addition to the "American Presidency Series," John Robert Greene concludes that the presidency of George Bush is best characterized by what political scientist Richard Rose calls "guardianship." Faced with significant obstacles to a successful administration in the field of domestic policy, such as divided government and a massive federal deficit, Bush pursued a consciously limited agenda. In the field of foreign policy, however, Bush took on a more active, and primarily successful, leadership role. Overall, Greene argues, "Bush did the best he could with a weak hand" (p. 183). While such a statement is hardly a ringing endorsement for the Bush administration, Greene has, nonetheless, cautiously begun what could be termed a revisionist interpretation of the Bush presidency. If borne out by further research, this interpretation could lead to a more favorable rating for a presidency that most historians have judged a failure.

Greene begins, as any serious study of the Bush presidency must, with an examination of the legacy of Ronald Reagan. Bush inherited a nation with a booming economy and a rediscovered sense of pride. Greene points out, however, that the Bush presidency was not an "interregnum" that was able to coast on the accomplishments of its predecessor. Reagan also left behind a $2.7 trillion debt, cultural anxiety fueled by the growing gap between rich and poor, increased drug use, the AIDS epidemic, and the Iran-Contra scandal. Thus the "heart of the Bush presidency," Greene says, resided in its attempt to deal with this more negative legacy (p. 1).

Based on his background in public service, it is a bit surprising that Bush's presidential fortunes would be so intimately tied to those of his predecessor. Bush served two terms as a Congressman from Texas' seventh district (1967-1970), was Ambassador to the United Nations and chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC) during the Nixon administration, and served as American Envoy to the People's Republic of China and Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) during the Ford administration. Dismissed as DCI by President Carter, Bush made his own run for the presidency in 1980. While Reagan's campaign appealed to conservative Republicans, Bush courted moderates, a strategy that won him a surprising early victory in the Iowa caucuses. After a resounding Reagan victory in New Hampshire, however, the Bush campaign lost momentum. Despite Bush having referred to the front-runner's supply-side fiscal policy as "voodoo economics," Reagan recognized the need to balance the Republican ticket with a moderate and chose Bush as his running mate. Once his name was on the ballot, Bush showed great loyalty to Reagan, even going so far as to compromise beliefs that would hurt the Republican ticket with conservative voters, such as his pro-choice views on abortion.

Reagan and Bush got along well and the vice president earned valuable experience advising the president in domestic and especially foreign policy. After eight years there would have been little reason to question Bush's nomination in 1988 had it not been for the Iran-Contra scandal. Accepting that Bush was in the room when Reagan approved the arms-for-hostages deal, Greene speculates on the more serious question of whether Bush was in on the decision to funnel the profits from that deal to the Nicaraguan Contras. He concludes that Bush's presence at numerous meetings where covert aid to the Contras was discussed definitely put him "in the loop," despite the claim that he did not participate in these discussions. Allegations surrounding Bush's role in Iran-Contra made his campaign for the Republican nomina-

tion in 1988 more interesting than it may otherwise have been, but after an early scare from Kansas Senator Bob Dole in the Iowa caucuses, Bush easily captured the nomination and went on to soundly defeat the Democratic nominee, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts.

The selection of Indiana Senator Dan Quayle as his vice-presidential nominee was one of the more fateful decisions of Bush's campaign. Greene argues that five years of late-night talk show jokes about Quayle have obscured the fact that "the choice of Dan Quayle as George Bush's running mate was an inspired one" that complimented Bush in nearly every way (p. 35). Bush did not "blow" the choice, Greene says, but he did mishandle the announcement of it by keeping it secret too long, thereby failing to give his staff enough time to deal with the inevitable questions that would surround it. Aside from the initial delay, it was Quayle himself, with his sophomoric behavior, who blew the chance to be seen as the perfect choice to balance the Republican ticket. Bush's other high-level appointments, according to Greene, may also mislead the casual observer of his presidency. While he retained seven members of Reagan's cabinet for his own, he adopted the strategy of most presidents since Nixon by giving the real power to the White House staff. Thus it was not the Reagan holdovers who made policy, but his own appointees in the White House, such as National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Richard Darman.

The massive budget deficit and the minority status of the Republican party in Congress precluded the possibility of Bush making a mark in the field of domestic policy. Instead he pursued what White House Chief of Staff John Sununu called a "limited agenda." Rather than propose an overall package of domestic legislation that had little chance of passage, Bush sought to influence Congress through creative use of the veto. Overwhelming Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress made it relatively easy for them to pass legislation. Bush, however, needed to retain only thirty-four of the forty-three Republican votes in the Senate to uphold his veto. In four years Bush vetoed forty-four bills, and his veto was upheld forty-three times. Greene points out that the times when Bush threatened to veto a bill were, perhaps, more important than the times when he actually did so. Republican success in upholding the president's veto afforded Bush the benefit of having his threats taken seriously. This, according to Greene "allowed Bush to put a conservative cast on legislation that was, in its original form at least, marked by the liberal slant of the Democratic Congress" (p. 62). Two important measures for which the Bush administration does deserve some credit are the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Clean Air Act Amendments, both of which were signed into law in 1990. Greene feels that Bush has received too much credit for the ADA, since it was already in Congress before Bush took office, but believes that the Clean Air Act Amendments are an example of Bush "at his policy-making best" (p. 75).

In the field of foreign affairs Bush's successes were more significant. Greene points out that Bush had agreed with few of Reagan's policies in this area. Regarding relations with the Soviets, Bush had opposed both the hard-line stance of Reagan's first term, and the "about-face" acceptance of disarmament in his second. More unsure of Gorbachev than Reagan had been, Bush chose, in the words of Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, "to apply the brakes to the Soviet-American relationship, pull over to the side of the road, and study the map for a while" (p. 90). The Soviets referred to this policy as the "pauza." The pause in Soviet-American relations lasted until the Malta Summit in December 1989. By this time the Berlin Wall had fallen and the Cold War had essentially come to an end. Greene argues that the pause, initiated by Bush, reaped "terrific benefits." Bush "had manipulated the situation so that he could negotiate with Gorbachev from strength, and in doing so he had won major concessions from the Soviets" (p. 108). Among these benefits were the incorporation of a reunified Germany into NATO, a muted Soviet response to American intervention in Panama, and most importantly, reluctant Soviet participation in the coalition of nations aligned against Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

The Persian Gulf War, precipitated by Iraq's invasion and annexation of neighboring Kuwait, was the United States' first major military engagement in the post-Cold War period. Greene's account of the war demonstrates Bush's predilection for foreign affairs, his ability to function in a crisis, and his awareness of the mistakes that had plagued previous administrations. Before committing United States troops to battle Bush sought the support of the international community, the United States Congress, and the American people. He received each. The United Nations Security Council met within hours of the invasion and unanimously passed UN Resolution 660, denouncing the invasion, calling for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, and promising sanctions if it did not. The United States Congress gave its support in the form of House Joint Resolution 77, "Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq." Bush himself convinced the majority of the American people that Hussein was an evil

man, not unlike Adolf Hitler, who had robbed Kuwait of its legitimate government. He left it up to Secretary of State James Baker to explain that vital economic interests, in the form of forty percent of the world's known oil reserves, were also at stake.

Once U.S. troops were committed to battle, the outcome was never in doubt. In fact American forces overwhelmed the Iraqis so quickly that the major controversy of the war became when to end it. Greene favors General Colin Powell's version of how that decision was made. Powell recalls that he informed Bush after the first day of fighting that Iraq's ability to wage war had been obliterated, and that he recommended ending the war as soon as possible. Bush agreed. When Powell informed General Norman Schwartzkopf of the decision Schwartzkopf offered no dissent. It was over a year later, during the 1992 presidential campaign, that Schwartzkopf publicly charged that Bush had ended the war too soon. By this time Iraq's refusal to adhere to the terms of peace and Hussein's crackdown on Shiite and Kurdish minorities had made the decision of when to end the war a controversial one.

Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of Greene's work is his answer to the question "How could he [Bush] have lost the presidency when he won the war? " (p. 151). Most historians have seemed satisfied with the answer provided by the campaign of presidential candidate Bill Clinton: "It's the economy, stupid." Greene, however, has provided a more serious, multi-causal explanation. Certainly the economy was a major factor. The budget deficit, the savings and loans bailout, and signs of an inevitable recession had caused Bush to renege on his "read my lips" pledge of no new taxes in 1990, a turnabout that caused a twenty-five point drop in his approval ratings.

The Gulf War, however, had more than made up for that drop. By the time of the cease-fire his approval rating was at eighty-four percent. Furthermore, by 1992, there were signs that the economy was beginning to recover. These facts caused Greene to seek out other reasons for Bush's demise, including: the resignation of Lee Atwater as RNC chair; Bush's health; the scandal surrounding the resignation of White House Chief of Staff John Sununu and the inability of Samuel Skinner to fill his shoes; the controversy surrounding the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court; the fall from power of Mikhail Gorbachev and Bush's reluctance to abandon him; Bush's support for the North American Free Trade Agreement; and a poorly run campaign plagued by bad press coverage.

The stated aim of The University Press of Kansas' American Presidency Series is to "cover the broad ground between biographies, specialized monographs, and journalistic accounts," and to "present the data essential to understanding the administration under consideration." Each volume in the series is intended to be "a comprehensive work that draws upon original sources and pertinent secondary literature yet leaves room for the author's own analysis and interpretation" (p. ix). In *The Presidency of George Bush* John Robert Greene has, as he did in his previous volume on Gerald Ford, fulfilled these aims admirably. The timely publication of this book, less than eight years following the end of the Bush administration, will allow it to serve as the starting point for future scholars who wish to delve more deeply into the presidency of George Bush. Scholars will be further aided by the excellent bibliographic essay that points out some of the difficulties of researching recent presidential history and guides the reader to appropriate secondary and available primary sources. In addition to providing this service, Greene has also offered a thoughtful, early historical analysis that portrays George Bush as a "guardian" president who performed reasonably well under difficult circumstances. The release of additional materials and the research they foster will determine whether Greene's interpretation will stand.

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