



Fred I. Greenstein, ed., *The George W. Bush Presidency: An Early Assessment* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, \$19.95, xiii-314 pages, ISBN 0-8018-7846-2)—Michael Meyer, Universität Koblenz-Landau

After having perused dozens of Bush-bashing books by liberal and leftist authors, such as Sheldon Rampton's & John Stauber's analytic *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq* (2003), Joe Conason's polemical *Big Lies: The Right-Wing Propaganda Machine and How It Distorts the Truth* (2003), and Michael Moore's acerbic *Stupid White Men* (2001), Fred I. Greenstein's collection of scholarly articles seems at first glance to beat about the bush. All of the contributors seem to share the ideas that Bush is an important president, that the Iraq war was successful, and that the United States should take a lead in world politics, ideas that have met with mixed responses outside the US, to say the least.

Some of the contributions "are clinically neutral in their dissection of Bush's performance, but others advance distinct points of view, ranging from near awe at the skill and will with which Bush has advanced his purposes to deep concern about the merit of those purposes" [x].

The first two contributions and the last one deal with Bush's character, leadership style, and political ethos. The framing articles deal with the President in a rather favourable light without, however, ignoring his weaknesses. Conceding that Bush's early academic, economic, and political careers were fraught with difficulties, Fred I. Greenstein claims "that he was growing into the job" [9] after September 11 and displayed "his detailed mastery of what his administration had come to call the war on terror" [10]. The writer enumerates the controversial reactions to Bush's economic and international policies but leaves their precise analysis and evaluation up to posterity. He attributes a very limited notion of "emotional intelligence" [13] as the control of passions, "ample native intelligence" [14] without intellectual curiosity, effective, "even eloquen[t]" [15] public communication, organizational leadership and policy vision to the President. Greenstein admits in a subdued note that Bush was less "surefooted" [16] abroad in his attempts at convincing the allies of necessary military action against Iraq but could have specified that Bush really antagonized a considerable part of the national and international public, as his critics' widespread slogan "blood for oil" exemplifies. In the final contribution to the volume, the first director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Democrat John J. Dilulio, Jr., praises Bush as a compassionate conservative and small—d democrat. Hugh Heclo gives a more balanced view of Bush, juxtaposing his ethics of responsibility, tactical skill, "focused agenda and decisive action" [45] with a lack of educational leadership, which he considers to be essential in the contemporary world of vast changes and complexity. It is very disconcerting, however, to read that the expert on history and politics repeatedly praises Bush's "triumph of the will" [45] without any apparent awareness that the phrase is closely associated with German fascism. The majority of the articles, which deal less with Bush's personality than his policy, are bolder in outlook and broader in horizon.

Karen M. Hult elucidates very well how Bush's organization of the White House closely connects policy and public relations in the context of a very "volatile and uncertain global environment" [75] and its continuous mass media coverage. I would have liked her to expand the discussion of Bush's media policy, including the work of the White House Coalition Information Center and the Office of Global Communications, a task that limitations of space might have prohibited.

Allen Schick convincingly explains Bush's paradoxical fiscal policy of cutting taxes while raising debts by enormous expenses on "security" as a calculated conservative strategy to pre-empt the growth of government. Schick considers "the current fiscal posture a colossal misstep" [80] because it will take a long time to rebalance the budget. He points out that Bush

would need to address the problems of social security and Medicare in the face of an ageing baby boomer generation, which Bush has done in his second term in office. However, Schick's conclusion that Bush is successful on tax reduction "but much less so on spending policy" [99] dissevers the connection between earnings and spending, which are but two sides of a coin.

Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay convincingly argue that Bush's mission-driven strategy of pre-emptive war may have convinced the American public, but fails both to meet the challenges of complex globalization and to convince international agents in order to coordinate an adequate multilateral response to worldwide conflicts. However, I fail to see why Bush's alleged change from a rather isolationist position to an aggressive hegemony in foreign policy justifies the term "revolution" [100] since, for example, the traditionally intrusive US policy in their "backyard" in Central America does not quite deserve the label of respectful multilateralism.

Charles O. Jones agrees with John C. Fortier and Norman J. Ornstein on respecting the President for his expert handling of the Congress. In a legislative body with small margins, Bush managed to control the agenda and to achieve many of his objectives by a clever choice of partisan, bipartisan, or cross-partisan strategies as necessary, complemented by capitalizing on his position in office by issuing decisive executive orders.

Gary C. Jacobson's and Richard A. Brody's contributions on the electorate's and the public's responses to Bush present overviews of the changes in his support in the context of political decisions and media coverage. After a brief "honeymoon" at the beginning of Bush's term in office, the president's public support soared tremendously after September 11 due to patriotism, but also Bush's opinion leadership, slowly trailed downwards due to corporate corruption, spiked again during the campaigns in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and gradually declined because of the public discussion of the downsides of these military interventions. While not delivering many new pieces of evidence to the informed reader of quality papers, these two articles give a precise and comprehensive picture that daily reports cannot deliver.

In sum, the articles avoid the extremes of conservative eulogies and liberal condemnations of Bush. The texts are very informative and extremely well written. They fulfil the high claim of excellent scholarly research to "analytic clarity, rigorous reasoning, sensitivity to complexity, and the ability to place new developments in a historical context" [x]. The volume is likely to expand and balance the possibly more reductive and critical European perspective on the President of the United States of America.