



Baby Bush, Baby Boomers: What None of Us Are Being Told about George W. Bush

[Steve Brouwer](#)

Fortunate Son: George W. Bush and the Making of an American President

by *J.H. Hatfield*

New York: Soft Skull Press, 2000

If the Gods Had Meant Us to Vote, They Would Have Given Us Candidates

by *Jim Hightower*

Harper Collins, 2000

Shrub: the Short but Happy Life of George W. Bush

by *Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose*

Random House, 2000

First Son: George W. Bush and the Bush Family Dynasty

by *Bill Minutaglio*

New York Times Books, 1999

W: Revenge of the Bush Dynasty

by *Elizabeth Mitchell*

Hyperion, 2000

George W. Bush, otherwise known as ""Shrub," and "W" (that's pronounced "Dubya" in Texan), has a terrible hankering to be our next president. The young Bush has excellent qualifications for the job. First, brand- name recognition. Second, an ability to raise huge sums of money by promising very rich Americans that he will do exactly what his father did: lower their taxes.

If Baby Bush does get hired to keep expanding the well-to-do-fare state, it will be because his fellow Baby Boomers think he's one of them. The children of uptight, penny-pinching, skeptical refugees of the Great Depression have grown up into uptight, free spending, born-again-and-again believers in the Great and Infinite Boom. Most Boomers don't seem to mind the idea of being governed by an underachieving, wise-ass bubba, a member of their never-aging cohort who won't make undue demands upon them.

Books by Mitchell, Minutaglio, and Hatfield (all conventional biographies) offer substantial evidence that George W. Bush is this kind of bubba. Raised on Eastern loot amid the booming oilfields of West Texas, Bush was bred to be an ideal East-Westerner, a kid equally at home among the old rich, blue-blooded Eastern Establishment and the new rich, hot-blooded Western Bible thumpers. The drawling, glad-handing teenager managed to goof off everywhere he went—Texas, Andover, Yale, Texas, Harvard, and Texas—until he was umpteen years old (well past forty). Young Bush excelled at such activities as head cheerleader (Andover); president of the Deke fraternity at Yale, where he defended the practice of branding pledges on the back with a small, red-hot metal triangle; heavy drinker and recreational drug user; and investor of tons of his father's friends' money, most of it sunk and lost in the murky oil fields around Midland, his home town.

Hatfield's *Fortunate Son* was the victim of corporate censorship in late 1999 when its original publisher, St. Martin's, under pressure from the Bush family, recalled about one hundred thousand copies and shredded them. (The book was quickly republished by a smaller and braver alternative publisher, Soft Skull Press.) Hatfield had angered George W. Bush with his "Afterword," which alleges that Dubya was arrested for cocaine possession in Texas in 1972, only to have his father arrange for a judge to immediately expunge the son's arrest record. Given the boy's party-animal reputation, the story is probably true. So what's new? A youngster gets busted for drugs and Poppy talks to a DA, who happens to live next door, or maybe to a magistrate at his tennis club. Happens all the time in upper-middle-class America: affirmative action for white boys has existed for two hundred years.



If the Gods Had Meant Us to Vote, They Would Have Given Us Candidates .
by *Jim Hightower*

Many Bush supporters, especially those from the Christian Right, are not fretting about his youthful indiscretions because they know Jesus has since led George W. to righteousness. And for those of us who are severely annoyed when the privileged go free and poor boys of color fill up the jail cells, the tale of Dubya's treatment before the law sounds all too familiar. There are, however, more important abuses of privilege that deserve our attention: these are the prerogatives of wealth and power that pertain only to the true upper class, advantages without which Dubya could not get elected dogcatcher.

Unfortunately, the books under review give us a disconnected smattering of facts about the Bush dynasty's links to the investing class. One of Dubya's robber-baron great-grandfathers, Samuel Bush, owned a steel company and helped invent the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Another, George H. Walker, who gave Shrub his "W," named the Walker Cup golf championship after himself. George H. Walker owned investment banks in New York and plantation houses in South Carolina. He was a firm believer in free and open international trade - in his case, taking a leading role in building up Nazi industry with American capital in the 1930s.

George W's grandfather was Prescott Bush, a Republican senator who was nonetheless quite comfortable managing the investment houses of fellow Yale alumnus Averill Harriman, the moneybags of the Democratic Party. The Bushes are the kind of people who get tapped in almost every generation for secretive elite clubs like Yale's Skull and Bones (Prescott and the Georges Senior and Junior) and not-so-secretive clubs like the Council on Foreign Relations.

Interesting stuff, but is it more than a matter of coincidence? None of our authors provides a coherent picture of how and why the upper class periodically makes use of its economic and social power to assert itself as a "ruling class." There is little discussion of how monied families connect with each other, not in secret gatherings that hatch "one world" conspiracies, but in comfortable social settings. There they can call on each other for discreet help in maintaining their capital, their privileges, and their political influence. These relationships are invisible to us commoners—except when a tenacious wealthy family decides to plug away at the thronship until they get it right: first George senior, then George W., and, quite likely, after he's messed up, we'll get George the III (who goes by the name of Jeb).

The Bush family demonstrated a nasty will to win in 1988 when they encouraged their political pit bull, Lee Atwater, in his program of negative campaigning and racist advertising (the infamous Willie Horton commercials). George W. worked closely with Atwater and in the process earned the admiration of another operative, Karl Rove, the guy who puts the bite into the Bush 2000 campaign. Voters can expect Bush 2000 to give Al Gore the same treatment that John McCain received: out of one side of the campaign's "mouth," a steady stream of trash-talk from soft-money surrogates; out of the other, pious, sentimentalized, and issue-free ads featuring the born-again Dubya.

Minutaglio's *First Son*, an otherwise lightweight effort, does provide a choice quote from Mary Matalin, the savvy Republican strategist who watched Baby Bush work in the trenches of his father's campaigns and has just signed on for the family's 2000 effort. She calls Dubya a "campaign terrorist," which from her is a high compliment. Mitchell's *W.*, the best of the three biographies, offers another reference to Dubya's political prowess, this one concerning the most intriguing non-story of his father's '88 campaign, the tale of a mistress. It seems that a bright and friendly young Englishwoman spent a year with George Senior on his ambassadorship to China (Barbara stayed home) and then remained on the Vice President's staff for years. When allegations of illicit love leapt from the alternative press (*Spy* magazine) toward the big time (*Newsweek*), it was George Junior who called upon *Newsweek*'s editors, denied the story, and asked them to get off his dad's back. The mainstream media immediately suppressed the story, as did rival Republican candidates. Clinton surely wishes he had had such luck in suppressing bimbo eruptions! Mitchell suggests that Dubya's success in dalliance diplomacy was a matter of deference to his good family name and upper-class connections, but she fails to explore the networks of elite power that influence media coverage.

Such experiences may have helped the young Dubya understand the limits of democracy, yet they have hardly qualified him for national office. What happened after 1988 to launch him toward political prominence? The most succinct and entertaining answers come from the non-biographers Molly Ivins and Jim Hightower. Ivins, of the *Fort Worth Star and Telegram*, is probably our most talented and funniest syndicated political columnist, while Hightower, the former Texas Commissioner of Agriculture, is a straight-talking lefty populist with a talent for long and humorous titles (his previous book was *There's Nothing in the Middle of the Road Except Yellow Stripes and Dead Armadillos*.) These two writers wisely eschew Dubya's forty-year boyhood in favor of analyzing recent local politics and lingo (they speak Texan). They easily manage to sniff out the trail of Shrub's evolution. It's a money trail. The Shrub gained his fame money in sports, starring for the Texas Rangers baseball team. Not on the field, mind you, but as cheerleader and waterboy for the plutocrats (from Texas, Yale, and Wall Street) who bought the team in 1989. Bush's billionaire buddies used America's favorite trick play—getting the local citizens to raise their own sales tax, build

a fancy stadium, then hand it over to the owners for free after a few years. Thus, Bush and his buddies tripled their money in less than ten years. The plutocrats gave Dubya a generous tip, nearly fifteen million dollars, for showing up at the ball park to greet the fans each day; more importantly, they propelled him into the governorship of Texas.

Anyone who saw George Walker Bush stand up and emcee the 1996 Republican Convention knew that the plutocrats of corporate America were grooming him for the big house, maybe in the company of Christy Whitman of New Jersey, another child of the investing class. Hightower thinks that the gods are observing this perversity and have instructed half of American voters to sit out the 2000 election. Citizens who want something different, such as democracy, says Hightower, ought to start organizing. They ought to "slug the corporate bastards right in the snout."

This approach is straightforward and commendable, as is Hightower's determination to spend less than a chapter on the life of Dubya. There is, however, a problem with attacking corporations as Enemy Number One, and that is the American consumer's tendency to view corporations as abstract purveyors of goods and services. If these entities exercise a profoundly antidemocratic influence over our lives, then whom do we "punch in the snout"? A corporate logo? A CEO who hangs around about four years before strapping on the golden parachute? Retired teachers whose pensions are invested in General Electric and Microsoft?

Corporations came into existence as legal conveniences permitting very rich men to pool their investments, retain individual rights to their profits, and avoid personal liability for the failures or crimes perpetrated by their businesses. Corporations are the best way yet contrived for the American upper class, always a dynamic blend of old and new rich, to exercise control over our political economy and our various layers of government. Have corporations become more democratic because more Americans now invest in mutual funds or trade on-line? Not on your life. It's still one dollar, one vote. The few thousand Americans who have fortunes of twenty-five million dollars and up still own or influence enough votes to elect every director of every major company. These directors appoint dictators, otherwise known as CEOs, whose jobs are decidedly authoritarian and undemocratic. A CEO makes all the rules, declares everyone (including himself) a slave to capital, and pursues one abstract goal singlemindedly: providing major investors with the highest possible return on their capital.

Herein lies the "miracle" of the ever-burning Bushes, one that is only partially alluded to in any of the books under review. Some of the people who control the largest American corporations and investment houses, or speak on their behalf, have been trying to establish plutocracy in America for over a century. Texas populists like Hightower and Ivins understand this, but they ought to provide some background for Americans who do not. The only books that elucidate the intersection of the class and corporate structures are academic offerings. The best of these is still G. William Domhoff's *Who Rules America? Power and Politics in the Year 2000*, a highly readable analysis, recently reissued. This book tells how the owners of capital set the parameters of public discourse at venues of corporate leadership such as the Business Roundtable and sponsor piously disinterested discussion of public policy at gathering places like The Council on Foreign Relations. The owners of capital also host innumerable philanthropic organizations that promote elite solutions to social and educational problems. If Baby Boomers read Domhoff's *WRA* (*Who Rules America?*) instead of watching WSW ("Wall Street Week...") or WWF (World Wrestling Federation), they might understand how the aristocracy of money allies itself with the institutions and the machinations of "the power elite," as C. Wright Mills has called the leadership of the military-industrial complex that consolidated itself after World War II.

Al Gore will never raise as much money as George W. Bush. Can Gore nonetheless stand up to the one-two punch of moneyed elites and corporate power? He can if he takes a page from Franklin Roosevelt, acknowledges his familiarity with the privileged life, and then summons the courage to show some contempt for the hands that feed him. He'll have to tell ordinary working-class and middle-class Boomers (wage- and salary-earners and small-business people) what they must already suspect from the evidence of their lives: they've been on the losing end of an undeclared class war for twenty years. The Boom has passed most of them by, and as a consequence, about one tenth of all national income (and an even higher percentage of national wealth) has been transferred from the bottom 95% of Americans to the top 5% (most going to the top 1%). The amount transferred is so large (about a trillion dollars a year) that, had it been earmarked for the economic security of all citizens, we would now be enjoying what citizens take for granted in most other advanced industrial nations: universal health coverage, a solid social-security system, good public education for all, and provision for the long-term care of elderly parents and spouses.

These measures, which FDR proposed as the "second Bill of Rights" in his annual message to Congress in 1944, are part of a Democratic political tradition that has been abandoned in recent decades. Clinton and the rest of the Democratic Party's leadership have joined the Money Party instead. Thus Al Gore shows no sign of embracing FDR's egalitarian legacy. He will probably not encourage Americans to follow Hightower's advice and "run right at the bastards."

Dubya is likely to win. If he does, the plutocracy will have further consolidated its victory in the Twenty Year War (the class war of 1980-2000). Most Baby Boomers won't know what they have lost or even which side they were on; the great-grandchildren of the robber barons will know very well what they are celebrating.

The Money Party will have bought the highest office and put a W on the door.

The Dubya will stand for "waterboy," waterboy to the billionaires.

ALSO DRAWN ON IN THIS ESSAY

Domhoff, G. William, *Who Rules America? Power and Politics in the Year 2000*, 3rd Edition. Mayfield Publishing Co., 1998. Paperback, 335 pp.\$22.95.

Hightower, Jim. *There's Nothing in the Middle of the Road Except Yellow Stripes and Dead Armadillos*. Harpercollins, 1998. Paperback, 308 pp.\$13.00.

SELECTED LINKS

[Bush's Skeleton Closet](#)

[The Dubya Virtual Magnetic Poetry Page](#)

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