

Tarnish on George Bush's silver spoon

by Nicholas F. Benton

Looking Forward: An Autobiography
by George Bush, with Victor Gold
Doubleday, New York, 1987
270 pages, hardbound \$18.95.

Vice President George Bush's autobiography—written, we presume, by his semi-ghostwriter Victor Gold—tells a lot about Bush, but not in the way one might think an autobiography would. It tells why so many Eastern Establishment leaders are expressing grave reservations about the ability of Bush to win an election or, more importantly, lead the country effectively through a period of deep austerity.

The book is shallow and trite. It is one more tasteless example of Bush playing to his perception of what an audience wants to hear. It is deliberately inane, speaking to the suburban "Mrs. Babbitt" mentality that he thinks represents the mainstream of America.

As a result, Bush must take credit for a book that is a worthless campaign handout, a verbose "bio" that few will read of their own free will, unless forced to as a journalist, or perhaps a high school student needing to complete a book report. As for its substantive content, it could be summarized in a few short paragraphs.

The image of Bush as the consummate rich brat and ambitious-thus-pliable tool of his elitist benefactors, comes through not only in the style, but also in the anecdotes he considers most important to include in the book. He bemoans his "preppie" image that his opponents in the fight for the Republican nomination derided him for in the 1980 campaign, the last time he ran for President.

But he confesses in his book that his preferred lifestyle, were a modern term applied to it, is 100% "yuppie." This is how he fondly describes his years living on "Easter Egg Row," a neighborhood of suburban houses, all with the same floor plan, in Odessa, Texas, in the early 1950s. There, the big event of the week was the Sunday afternoon hamburger barbecue.

Although Bush has held down a remarkable number of different political posts since he was chosen to become the

chairman of the Harris County Republican Party in Houston in 1962, almost everything he's done in his life has been handed to him on a silver platter. The only exception came during World War II, a period in American history that was the best moment in the lives of many Americans. Bush flew 58 combat missions off the carrier *San Jacinto* in the Pacific, and received the Distinguished Flying Cross.

George was the son of Prescott Bush, who served from 1952-62 in the U.S. Senate from Connecticut, and was a partner in the firm of Brown Brothers, Harriman and Co. He went to the same school as his dad, Yale, where (in one item he failed to note in his book), he was inducted into the exclusive "Skull and Bones" society. This masonic-style brotherhood assured him an easy road to success the rest of his life.

George finished Yale after the war. He devotes almost as much of the book to describing how he improved his batting average playing for the Yale baseball team, as he does to his flying missions in the Pacific.

Finishing school in 1947, George was given a job working for Dresser Industries as an oil drilling equipment supplier in Odessa. The work took him to California briefly, but back to Odessa in 1950. There, he decided to launch into his own business, but not without plenty of help, again, from his Eastern Establishment friends. This time it was Eugene Meyer, of Lazard Frères and the World Bank, and father of Katharine Meyer Graham, present owner of the *Washington Post*, who put up \$50,000 of his own money and an undisclosed amount on behalf of his son-in-law, to set Bush up in business.

Then Bush linked up with another blueblood, Harvard Business School graduate Hugh Liedtke, to form Zapata Oil. Liedtke split off soon after to form what became Pennzoil, but by then Bush had secured his financial base to enter into politics.

He had his pathway greased for this as well. In 1962, having moved to Houston, he was given the job of Republican county chairman to keep it out of the hands of the John Birch Society, which was blaming people like him, members of the Council on Foreign Relations, for being soft on communism.

In 1964, Bush ran for U.S. Senate against incumbent Ralph Yarborough, a liberal Democrat, and lost the race. But in 1966, he found a newly formed Congressional District on the west side of Houston where he'd won by an 8-to-5 margin in 1964, and had a cakewalk winning a seat in Congress. Republicans have never been seriously challenged in that district before or since.

Reelected in 1968, Bush was induced to make another run against Yarborough in 1970, but lost again when a more moderate Democrat, Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, knocked Yarborough out in the primary, and then handily trounced Bush.

But Bush's friends in powerful places had not forgotten him. He was immediately appointed U.S. ambassador to the United Nations by President Nixon in December 1970. Bush was valued by his Eastern Establishment colleagues because,

as he writes, they knew him as "someone who wouldn't overestimate his role." That is, he was a wimp.

After Nixon was reelected in 1972, he thought Bush would be more useful functioning as his pliable tool, heading the Republican National Committee, so he placed him there. But Bush proved so pliable that he was not only unable to rally support for Nixon within the party during the Watergate scandal, but became among the first to jump ship and call for his resignation.

In 1974, President Ford found more use for Bush, appointing him U.S. liaison officer in Peking, where his job was to coordinate logistics for visits to the P.R.C. by Henry Kissinger.

The 'tame elephant'

In 1976, Bush was a benefactor of Ford's famous "Halloween Massacre," when Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, National Security Adviser Kissinger, and CIA Director William Colby were all canned at once (although Kissinger stayed on as secretary of state). Bush plugged the gap at the CIA for a year, on the promise to Congress that he would be a "tame elephant" (in his words). While there was significant opposition to the Bush appointment among Republicans, he was supported by *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker and Democratic Sen. Walter Mondale, soon to be the vice president.

Bush was out of a job with the election of Carter, but started his run to derail Reagan as the front-runner in the bid for the Republican presidential nomination in May 1979. Bush had the benefit of a strong party organization in Iowa, and beat Reagan there in the January 1980 caucuses, 31.5% to 29.4%. This brought Bush from 39 points behind Reagan in the polls to within 6 points. But then came New Hampshire. Bush lost to Reagan there, 50% to 23%, but he confined the real truth behind this smashing defeat to a tiny, misplaced footnote in his book. There, on page 79, he notes that his membership in the elite Trilateral Commission was used against him in New Hampshire.

It was the LaRouche campaign that made an electoral issue out of Bush's elitist Eastern Establishment ties, including his membership in "Skull and Bones" and the Trilateral Commission. Seeing its healthy effect on New Hampshire Republicans, the Reagan camp soon adopted the theme as well, and the fate of Bush was sealed.

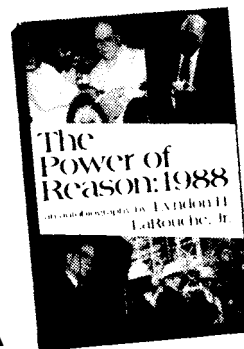
Bush was added to the Republican ticket to mollify the bluebloods—the first signal that Reagan was vulnerable to the type of political deals that have been the undoing of his administration ever since.

But the cakewalk that has been the career of George Bush to date, all in faithful service to his elitist "crowd," may be nearing its end. It is symptomatic of the condition of Bush's campaign now that he was compelled to devote the entire closing section of his book to a defense of his role in the Iran-Contra scandal. One can only be a sycophant for so long before it catches up with you.

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The Book
At Them

(but read it first)

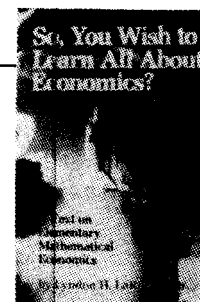


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