
Book Review

Bush on the Ceiling, But Off the Wall

by Jeffrey Steinberg

In light of recent reports that President George W. Bush is in an unreachable state of what some would dare to allege as absolute insanity, the editors of EIR have decided that it is appropriate to republish this 2004 book review of Dr. Justin Frank's important book, Bush on the Couch—Inside the Mind of the President. The review was originally titled "The Ugly Truth About G.W. Bush," and appeared in EIR of Aug. 20, 2004.

Dr. Frank's book has been recently published in Great Britain by the prestigious Methuen Press. The new edition includes an Afterword, which updates the profile of the President through the 2004 election campaign, and the early months of his second term in office. The May 2006 British updated edition can be purchased through www.amazon.co.uk.

Bush on the Couch—Inside the Mind of the President

by Justin A. Frank, M.D.

New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004
219 pages, hardbound, \$24.95

Dr. Justin Frank has performed a courageous and insightful mission. On the eve of the most important Presidential election of our lifetime, he has applied his decades of clinical experience as a psychoanalyst to offer an in-depth profile of President George W. Bush. To be more precise, Dr. Frank has provided American voters with a case study in what is called "applied psychoanalysis." As Dr. Frank describes it in *Bush on the Couch*, applied psychoanalysis is a relatively new field of investigation, in which teams of skilled psychiatrists utilize the vast reservoirs of clinical data on world leaders to do in-depth personality profiles. Years ago, the Central Intelligence Agency established an applied psychoanalysis unit, under Dr. Jerrold M. Post, a colleague of Dr. Frank at the George Washington University Medical Center. The CIA confines its efforts to foreign leaders. Dr. Frank has chosen to apply the same rigorous techniques to the sitting President.

Ironically, in the case of some world leaders, such as the American President, the clinical psychoanalyst is afforded access to more useful data than he can obtain on his own patients. Dr. Frank makes no secret of the fact that he has never treated George W. Bush. Yet, he had access to massive amounts of video footage of the President, autobiographical and biographical data on Mr. Bush and many of his most intimate associates, including virtually every member of his family, and other clinical data not often available on his patients. He rarely has the opportunity to observe the patient in his or her everyday life. With President Bush, Dr. Frank had access to hundreds of hours of unedited video footage of him going about the business of governing the most powerful nation on Earth.

When I first opened *Bush on the Couch*, I expected to read a highly entertaining, humorous partisan screed. I recalled that Dr. Frank had penned an insightful profile of Whitewater independent counsel Kenneth Starr in the online magazine *Salon* at the height of the impeachment travesty against President Clinton. But *Bush on the Couch* is anything but a screed. It is a carefully written, clinical treatment that is a must-read for all American voters—Republican, Independent, and Democrat—before November.

Had Dr. Frank been writing a clinical profile of George W. Bush for peer or court review, the document would have taken perhaps 20 or 30 pages. A great deal of *Bush on the Couch* is taken up with providing sufficient fundamentals of the clinical psychoanalytic process and bibliographical background on the field, to permit the lay reader to grasp the gravity of George W. Bush's psychological problems. The book is at once a devastating psychological dossier on the 43rd President, and a compassionate profile of a human being in need of care.



Justin Frank

The Role of Cheney

After reading *Bush on the Couch* and interviewing the author, I confess that I have been forced to rethink some fundamental assumptions about the Bush-Cheney Administration. It has been clear that the real power at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue resides with Vice President Dick Cheney, not with President Bush. It is Cheney, his alter-ego Lewis Libby, and the legions of neo-conservative wanna-be Liberal Imperialists ("Limps") who populate the VP's office and the civilian bureaucracy at the Pentagon who formulated the preventive war doctrine; revived an aggressive, offensive nuclear war doctrine; and made war on Iraq—not G.W. Bush. But, as Dr. Frank emphasizes, if President Bush is the puppet of Cheney,

he is a puppet who chooses his puppeteers, and who carries out his Presidential decisions with a clear inner conviction that he is the true power, the ultimate decision-maker. Whatever the truth is about the decision-making process inside the Bush White House, Bush has a megalomaniacal conviction that he is the king of the roost.

This is not an insignificant factor, particularly as Americans prepare to cast the most important Presidential vote of their lives in November. Dick Cheney is facing a string of criminal investigations and possible indictments—for the leaking of the identity of CIA “non-official cover” officer Valerie Plame, the wife of former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, and for possible bribery and illegal political contributions when he was CEO of Halliburton. Indictments of Cheney, for violations of a string of national security and espionage statutes, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, and the Trading With the Enemy Act, cannot be ruled out before the November elections. Such happy events would lead to Cheney’s resignation as Vice President, and would likely also lead to drying out the neo-con swamp. This would also, as some Republicans note, create the opportunity to choose a new running mate for George W. Bush, one more acceptable to Republican traditionalists, from East Coast and Midwest moderates to West Coast Reaganites. This could significantly boost the prospects of a Bush reelection.

Would a second, “reinvented” Bush term as President be good for the nation? Would a George W. Bush, freed from the policy grips of Dick Cheney, have a chance of serving in the nation’s vital interests? After reading *Bush on the Couch*, I conclude that the answer is a resounding “No.” If the profile of George W. Bush presented by Dr. Frank is even partially accurate, the man is a menace in office—with or without a Dick Cheney svengali lurking in the shadows.

The Clinical G.W.

I do not intend to use the remainder of this review to provide a detailed summary of Dr. Frank’s diagnosis of the 43rd President. I urge readers to purchase and read the book. It cannot be done justice in a few short paragraphs.

Dr. Frank opens the first chapter with a crisp summary of his own, of what he meticulously documents in the 219 pages of text that follow: “If one of my patients frequently said one thing and did another, I would want to know why. If I found that he often used words that hid their true meaning and affected a persona that obscured the nature of his actions, I would grow more concerned. If he presented an inflexible worldview characterized by an oversimplified distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, allies and enemies, I would question his ability to grasp reality. And if his actions revealed an unacknowledged—even sadistic—indifference to human suffering, wrapped in pious claims of compassion, I would worry about the safety of the people whose lives he touched.

“For the past three years, I have observed with increasing alarm the inconsistencies and denials of such an individual. But he is not one of my patients. He is our president.”

With clinical objectivity, Dr. Frank draws upon the mass of material available in the public domain about the President, particularly George W. Bush’s own, documented remarks, to paint a picture of a man suffering from a number of serious, but potentially treatable psychological disorders. Among them: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), untreated and uncured alcoholism (what is commonly referred to today as “dry drunk”), an omnipotence complex, paranoia, an Oedipal Complex, sadism, a mild form of Tourettes Syndrome, and a diminished capacity to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

All of these disorders stem from what Dr. Frank describes as Bush’s “diminished ability to manage anxiety.”

Childhood Trauma

How did George Bush come to be such a psychological wreck? According to Dr. Frank, who places significant emphasis on unresolved childhood trauma, in his clinical work, George Bush suffered several notable shocking experiences in his childhood, in which his parents, George H.W. Bush and Barbara Bush, failed to provide the needed loving adult care to help him through the experiences. In this sense, Dr. Frank provides a very compassionate picture of the President.

Dr. Frank described the most traumatic of those childhood experiences: “George W. was six years old at the beginning of the tragic episode that he has said yielded his first vivid childhood memories—the illness and death of his sister. In the spring of 1953, young Robin was diagnosed with leukemia, which set into motion a series of extended East Coast trips by parents and child in the ultimately fruitless pursuit of treatment. Critically, however, young George W. was never informed of the reason for the sudden absences; unaware that his sister was ill, he was simply told not to play with the girl, to whom he had grown quite close, on her occasional visits home. Robin died in New York in October 1953; her parents spent the next day golfing in Rye, attending a small memorial service the following day before flying back to Texas. George learned of his sister’s illness only after her death, when his parents returned to Texas, where the family remained while the child’s body was buried in a Connecticut family plot. There was no funeral.”

This is but one of dozens of compelling, and shocking vignettes that pepper Dr. Frank’s book. The complex and twisted world of President George W. Bush must be understood by the American people, to fully appreciate the mess that the United States has fallen into. To his credit, Dr. Frank included a chapter in his profile of the President, entitled “He’s Our Man,” which takes up the question of how and why the American people have backed this man, particularly after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.