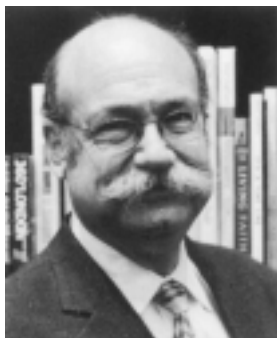

Interview: Dr. Justin Frank

George Bush: 'A Puppet Who Chose His Puppeteers'

Dr. Justin Frank, the author of Bush on the Couch, a devastating professional psychoanalytic profile of President George W. Bush, was interviewed on July 26, 2004, by EIR Senior Editor Jeffrey Steinberg. Dr. Frank is a practicing psychoanalyst in Washington, and is on the faculty of the George Washington University Medical School.



EIR: What kind of reception have you received so far, from the book?

Frank: Well, the main criticism—it's been not well-promoted by my publisher, unfortunately. But the main reception I've been getting has been really positive from everybody who's read it, and not so positive from people who haven't read it. Because the idea of it is problematic to two different groups of people. One is the psychiatry community—psychiatric and psychoanalytic—and the other, of course, is the Republicans. The Republicans have fairly much dismissed it, and they write these occasionally vituperative comments at Amazon.com, saying it is a terrible book, but none of them has read it, although it does bring the rating down.

But as far as the psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, a lot of people are disturbed about it, they're not very familiar with applied psychoanalysis, and then when they are, they feel that it should only be used for foreign leaders; and Gerald Post, in fact, feels that way. So I've gone out on a limb.

As far as the other reactions, the positive reactions are from everybody who's read it.

EIR: My own reaction was that it's a very, very serious and very in-depth study. I was struck by the fact that the whole underlying concept of applied psychoanalysis is that public figures offer, in some respects, more clinical material than even individuals who are patients whom you only see under limited circumstances.

Frank: They offer so much more material for observation, and then you have to piece it together yourself, because usually in public life people are not free-associating, so they

don't just say one thing, and go to the next, and go back and forth the way they do in my office, but they offer so much information by virtue of being in the public eye. So I get to see tons of video tapes, read everything they've written, and all of that.

I think that one of the things that is frustrating, is that I don't get to work as much with the emotional interaction, because there is none. I have emotional reactions, but there is no emotional interaction, which is called transfers and countertransfers. But as far as the material goes, that's right. And I am really struck by how much more I see of Bush, and everything that I know about my patients is based on work in the consulting room, and then my fantasies about them, you know, how I think about them.

EIR: One of the things that we've focussed on a great deal, more from the standpoint of a political assessment of the Administration, is that Bush seems to have developed a rather deep psychological dependence on Vice President Cheney as the person to make most of the really tough decisions in the Administration. Would you share that view?

Frank: I don't entirely share that view, because my view is that he is a puppet who chose his puppeteers, so in that sense he is dependent on him, but in another sense I think he is dependent on him for supporting his decisions, but I think that Bush makes the decisions. I think that he is dependent on Cheney for thinking them through in public, and for articulating them. And for being the kind of public, outspoken person, and so he had to go with Cheney to the 9/11 Commission. And that's about dependency, I agree with you. But my sense is that he really knows what he wants to do once he hears stuff, and he is basically focussed on very few things. The main reason for depending on Cheney, and I can see that politically, the main reason is that he does not like to do the work of thinking, because it makes him too anxious. And most of the ideas in my book are about Bush's functioning to defend against anxiety. And that's really basically what he's about.

EIR: What I found particularly striking is a kind of a deadly mix of experiences: the trauma over his sister's death, and the way the family handled that. Then developing an at least

alcohol—some people say alcohol and drug dependency—for quite a number of years. It seemed to me that this is almost a kind of very extreme clinical case of somebody who's nominally walking around as functional, but really has got deep, deep psychological scars.

Frank: Yes, it has to do with the fact that he was never able to mourn, and when you don't mourn, you can't integrate your inner life. What happens is that, as I write in the book, sorrow is the vitamin of growth, and until you face who you are and what you've lost, you really can't organize your mind, and so what happens is when you're the first born, and the next one dies, you're left with a lot of unworked-out hostility, anger, guilt, that maybe your wishes killed them. You have lots of magical thinking, and if you don't have a family that helps you gather those things together, you can be in a lot of trouble.

So then you have to manage your feelings yourself. And one of the ways people do manage them when they are that age, is they have friends to talk to; but he doesn't seem to have had anybody to talk to much. But they also read, and pay attention to things, so they learn about human beings from reading about other people, if their parents aren't responsive to them. But he really has such a hard time reading, that it's like swimming with weights. I mean, it's just too much for him. So he didn't have that avenue either, so he became sometimes cruel to people, with animals, which is one way of managing your aggression, and then to drink in order to manage his anxiety, and he became a very heavy drinker, that's very clear, till he was 40, at least.

EIR: Again, the idea that someone doesn't cure the alcoholism, but just simply stops the drinking, doesn't deal with the underlying issues; is this somebody who could go back to drinking?

Frank: Yes, in fact I think that's one of the reasons why the press walks on egg shells: Nobody confronts him about falling off the couch, nobody confronts him about falling off of his bicycle. People are too afraid to even ask the question. It's one thing to make an assumption—I don't think you should assume that he is drinking again—but you need to be free enough to ask the question; but when you are an alcoholic who's untreated, family members—and I've done a lot of studies of families with alcoholics, and treated a lot—they tiptoe around, and they are afraid to throw their father or their mother back on a drinking binge. And I think that is what the press has done, they're walking on egg shells.

EIR: One of the at-least hypotheticals is that if the Halliburton scandals, and possibly the Valerie Plame grand jury were to reach a kind of critical mass before the Republican convention, end of August, that there could be a change in the ticket, with Cheney stepping down, maybe for medical or other reasons. What kind of psychological impact do you think that might have on Bush, that kind of sudden change,

and forced admissions of some problems?

Frank: Well, I really think that he has honed his defenses to a very fine point, and I don't see that that would really affect him that much. I actually think he is so disconnected that he would just disconnect himself, and go to his inner version of Crawford, Texas, just retreat to the Crawford of his mind. And I think that's what he does always when there is anything that bothers him: He zones out. You can see it on television; you can see him glaze over. So if Cheney left, I think he would zone out, and he would be taken care of by the three women in his life: Karen Hughes, Laura Bush, and Condi Rice. And they really do take care of him. I think that he would find some other vice president. But I really think that the only way to really break through, and get through to him, would not be losing Cheney. The only way would be for somebody to actually directly confront him in a clear way, to bring him out, so you would really see the bully, and you would also see the fear.

So Cheney is very powerful, and Cheney is really a destructive guy, but I don't think that Bush needs him as much as we like to think he does. That is one of the strengths of Bush. Bush is an amazing person at ducking blame and ducking responsibility, so he's even got a lot of people who oppose him thinking it's all Cheney's fault. And through this secret way, it's a way of getting off the hook yet again.

EIR: Final question: Of course you are here at the Democratic National Convention. I'm finding in just the general activity down in Washington, that there are also now a large and growing number of Republicans who find themselves deeply alarmed that someone whom they consider to be so intellectually shallow, and so psychologically damaged as President, that they're having a hard time thinking about voting a second time. I would think that there would be kind of a Republican audience, perhaps maybe more subterranean, that would be very interested in the book as well.

Frank: I would love to find who they are, and if I could find Republican groups, I would be very interested in talking with them, because I do think there's an audience for this. I think that they are very concerned about a couple of things: One is the deficit spending; two is really pre-emptive war. And three, I think some of them, especially the ones that are not very deeply religious, are concerned with this kind of mission quality that he has, and his deep connection to Jesus. I think that all of those three things are really very deeply disturbing to Republicans who come from a different—and then the arrogance, which a lot of people have commented on. Senator Byrd's new book is great. He talks about the arrogance of Bush, and how lots of Republicans that he knows, colleagues, are quite alarmed. So I think there would be a big audience. I don't know who they would vote for, and they may not vote, but I'm always reminded of what Harry Truman said, you know: "If you want to live like a Republican, vote Democratic." I always laughed at that.