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'Not very analytical': Bush skims over his presidency

Colman McCarthy | Jan. 7, 2011

Former President George W. Bush discusses his memoirs, Decision Points, during a forum at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, Calif., Nov. 18. (UPI/Jayne Kamin-Oncea)

COLUMN

To help George W. Bush make money and zip around the country talking about himself, lots of people paid $28.95 for one of the 775,000 copies of the former president?s book, *Decision Points*, the first week it went on sale. Lacking both the spare time and the stomach, I didn?t catch all the media interviews Bush sat for. To name a few: Oprah Winfrey, Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Bill O?Reilly, Jay Leno, Matt Lauer, Greta Van Susteren, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, FOX, CNN and CBS. I did hear, watch and read enough of them, though, to conclude that Bush more than fulfilled his mission: ?I want to sell books.?

The interviews, mixtures of pitter-patter, banter and canned bromides, revealed a politician of no discernable mettle, unless you equate it with the intellectual swagger behind his ?Bring ?em on? reference to al-Qaida or the cowboy bluster of getting Osama bin Laden ?dead or alive.? In both his interviews and book, Bush shows a mind incapable of introspection while adept at dealing in predictable self-congratulation and self-serving tales of an eight-year presidency marked by deceit, corruption and incompetence.

On NBC News he defended waterboarding, the interrogation technique that simulates drowning and that other nations condemn as torture. Bush was asked how he justified it. ?Because the lawyer said it was legal,? he replied. ?He said it did not fall within the antitorture act. I?m not a lawyer. But you gotta trust the judgment of people around you, and I do.?

That Bush chitchatted about how he wasn?t a lawyer brings to mind the collection of public statements he made between 1997 and 2004, as recounted in *Harper?s Magazine*, May 2004: ?I?m not a statistician.? ?I?m not a numbers-cruncher.? ?I?m not a doctor.? ?I?m not a forecaster.? ?I?m not a predictor.? ?I?m not pollster, a poll-reader guy.? ?I?m not a precision guy.? ?I?m not a censor guy.? ?I?m not a very formal guy.? ?I?m not a committee chairman.? ?I?m not a poet.? ?I?m not a textbook player.? ?I?m not an e-mailer.? ?I?m not a stockbroker.? ?I?m not of the Washington scene.? ?I?m not an Iraqi citizen.? ?I?m not a very good novelist.? ?I?m not a long-winded person.? ?I?m not a revengeful person.? ?I?m not a divider.? ?I?m not a unilateralist.? ?I?m not a tree, I?m a Bush.?

Large thanks for clearing all that up.

Bush admits to having a regret or two about what he sees as mistakes. Prancing on the aircraft carrier under the ?Mission Accomplished? banner was one. Instead of that, he said he should have put up a sign saying: ?Good going, men and women. Great mission -- or something like that, I don?t know.?

Nowhere in the book are there expressions of sorrow or remorse at the loss of life to Iraqi and Afghan civilians, nor acknowledgement that his war on terror became a war that creates terror. For Bush, Operation Iraqi Freedom and the fall of Saddam Hussein fulfills his statement of March 10, 2003, days before the invasion of Baghdad: ?The life of the Iraqi citizen is going to dramatically improve.?

According to story after story in the European press, and lately in the American media, which out of misguided patriotism initially was duped into supporting Bush, the war has proven to be thankless, reckless and winless. In detailed stories on Sept. 1 and Nov. 4 titled ?After Years of War in Iraq, Few See a Brighter Future? and ?In the New Iraq, a Familiar Taste of Misery,? Anthony Shadid reported in *The New York Times* that the violence-plagued country is ungovernable and broken.

If Bush is stunningly indifferent to the loss of civilian life in Iraq and Afghanistan, he is no less so regarding American soldiers. In eight years, the commander in chief never attended a funeral at Arlington Cemetery.

Perhaps he took his cue from the family matriarch, the haughty Barbara Bush, who told ABC News on March 18, 2003, when Iraq was invaded: ?Why should we hear about body bags and deaths? Oh, I mean it?s not relevant. So why should I waste my beautiful mind on something like that??

Bush, enriched by book royalties plus six-figure lecture fees, is doing well. ?I?ve got a very comfortable life,? he told one interviewer. To another: ?I?m a contented person. I came out of the White House a better person.?

As for wondering about those whose lives have worsened, or ended, because of his economic or military policies, there?s one more self-description he offered: ?I?m not very analytical.?

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