



Bush Country

(From the book *Bush Country: How Dubya Became a Great President While Driving Liberals Insane* by John Podhoretz. St. Martin's, 276 pp., \$24. Published in *The Weekly Standard*, from the February 23, 2004, issue 23)

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"ONE MIGHT CONCLUDE, from his conduct over the past three years," John Podhoretz begins "**Bush Country: How Dubya Became a Great President While Driving Liberals Insane**" (St. Martin's, 276 pp., \$24.95), "that George W. Bush was put on this earth to do two things: First, to lead the United States into the third millennium, with all its terrifying challenges and wondrous opportunities. And second, to drive liberals insane. He's succeeding brilliantly at both."

A contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD--and one of the magazine's founders eight years ago--Podhoretz defends the president against the bizarre charges far too often brought against him: that Bush is a "moron," a "puppet," a "fanatic," a "cowboy," etc. On the topic of

Bush's religion, for instance, "Bush Country" explains, "You don't have to believe the same things Bush believes about the centrality of Christ in our lives to see what he saw in the September 11 attacks--the first shot in a geopolitical battle between the forces of good and those who thirst for the blood of the innocent." On the topic of Bush's occasional malapropisms, Podhoretz insists, "Bush is the best presidential speaker since Franklin Delano Roosevelt." Indeed, the president has positioned himself as "the master of low expectations"--with an unambiguous political result: "People who think he's a sucker are being played for suckers."

"Bush Country" is a fun read, filled with telling political observations: "His presidential style is almost completely the re-

verse of Clinton's. The forty-second president of the United States was daring in the way he pursued his personal hungers. But whenever Clinton tried to be bold in matters of personal policy--such as the mammoth health-care plan designed by his wife, Hillary--the results were usually disastrous. The cautious, careful, even timid Clinton was the victorious Clinton. He closely followed public-opinion polls and tailored his policies to suit the public mood," Podhoretz writes. "By contrast, George W. Bush has remarkable self-discipline in his personal life. To a man, his close aides describe him as the most disciplined person they've ever known. When it comes to matters of policy, however, Bush has the instincts of a gambler."

But Podhoretz is willing as well to shift away from politics and consider the broader, world-historical picture. "Here is what Bush understood: We are vulnerable because we are free. We are vulnerable because we are a beacon of freedom that draws hundreds of millions to bask in liberty's light, even if only for a brief moment. The beacon also provided the perfect guiding light for a team of suicide terrorists with a clever and unpredictable plan."

The combination of immediate political smarts and longer-term understanding studs "Bush Country" with moments of real insight into our current situation. "To the extent that the attack on Bush is purely partisan, all one can say is: that's life. Democrats want a Democrat in the White House, and that can only happen if the American people turn on George W. Bush. Democrats see it as their job to make that happen, and while many of their attacks are unfair, they are justified by the warp-and-wool of American politics," Podhoretz explains. "The *ideological* attack against Bush, however, is a different matter."

And from it all, John Podhoretz builds his case that we are witnessing a great presidency: "George W. Bush has laid out the path this country must take if it is to be secure, and the first steps we've taken down this long road are worthy of celebration. The celebration should be sober, even somber, as befits the challenges of the present moment, the difficulties that lie ahead, and the grieving that still goes on for those lost in the war on terror. But America has done some extraordinary and wonderful things these past three years. Bush Country has found its calling."