

REMEMBER THE ALAMO

by NICHOLAS LEMANN

How George W. Bush reinvented himself.

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When something important doesn't turn out the way you expected, you go back to the beginning and try to see if there were clues you missed. In the summer of 1999, I drove up to Cooperstown, New York, for my first view of George W. Bush in action as a politician. I thought of it as a trip in the spirit of the opening scene of "All the King's Men," where Jack Burden goes to see Willie Stark in a small-town appearance so that he can find out what the fuss is about. Bush was going to Cooperstown for the induction of Nolan Ryan—Texan, former Texas Ranger, all-time strikeout leader—into the Baseball Hall of Fame. He was already in the thick of running for President, so he had other business to attend to as well; there was a fund-raiser for him in Cooperstown, and he had a long private discussion with Governor George Pataki that people thought might be Pataki's Vice-Presidential audition. But he was plainly going out of his way to make time for Ryan.

Besides the induction ceremony, there was an event in an auditorium for Bush, Ryan, and the press. Bush ambled onto the stage without a lot of ceremony. He was wearing a light-colored sports jacket and slacks, and he made a crack about how Ryan was lucky enough to be able to come out in shorts and sandals. With evident relief, Bush declared that he wasn't there to talk about politics—just sports. The main impression he made was of a man who liked baseball a great deal and admired Nolan Ryan extravagantly. Ryan exemplifies a certain type of Texas maleness, a type that Bush seems to hold almost in awe, perhaps because, contrary to perceptions in Blue America, Europe, and places of that sort, in the Texas context Bush isn't as brawnily masculine as it gets. (Bush is a guy who hunts doves and quail but not deer.) Ryan is tall, laconic, devoted to church and family, rural by upbringing and current residence and urban only by the temporary necessity of playing major-league ball. And tough as hell.

In answer to a question from the audience, Bush alluded, with a low chuckle, to what I'd heard from friends in Texas was his favorite Nolan Ryan moment—on August 4, 1993. Ryan, on the mound at Arlington Stadium, with Bush not far away, in the owner's box, struck Robin Ventura, of the Chicago White Sox, with a pitch. Ventura lost his temper and charged the mound. Ryan, who was then forty-six years old, twenty years Ventura's senior, caught Ventura in a headlock and delivered six blows to his head and face, from a distance of about six inches, really whaling the shit out of him. The scene quickly became a canonical bit of sports video. It's a wonderful example of super-aggressive behavior presenting itself as a form of self-defense when, strictly speaking, it isn't—Ryan had started things by hitting Ventura, after all. But Ryan got to be doubly the hero, slower to anger but also unquestionably physically dominant. Bush, obviously, loved it. "It was a fantastic experience for the Texas Rangers fans," he said.

A couple of months later, Bush made another sports-flavored trip to the Northeast. On a weekend when he had been invited to appear at the California Republican Party convention, in Orange County, Bush, to the mystification of the political press, flew to Boston. There he was photographed, with his parents and his brother Jeb, watching the Ryder Cup golf championship at The Country Club in Brookline—the sort of venue where he usually took pains not to be seen publicly. There was, inevitably, another fund-raiser to attend in nearby Wayland but his real reason for being there was something else: the captain of the American Ryder

Cup team, Ben Crenshaw, of Austin, Texas, was another athlete hero-friend of Bush's, and he had asked Bush to come to Brookline to give the U.S. Ryder Cup team a pep talk if necessary. And, sure enough, the European team opened up what seemed to be an insurmountable lead. On the eve of the last day of the match, Bush came into the room where the team was gathered and, by prearrangement with Crenshaw, recited the text of William Barret Travis's letter from the Alamo.

Travis was the commander of the small, valiant Texas force that held off, but was ultimately wiped out by, the Mexican Army at the Battle of the Alamo, in 1836, when Texas was fighting to become an independent republic. What the Declaration of Independence or the Gettysburg Address is nationally, Travis's letter, an unanswered call for reinforcements, is to Texans. Bush probably encountered it in a Texas-history class at Sam Houston Elementary School in Midland. "I am besieged by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna," Travis wrote (and Bush repeated to the Ryder Cup team). "I have sustained a continual Bombardment and cannonade for twenty-four hours and have not lost a man. The enemy has demanded surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken. I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. I shall never surrender or retreat." Travis ends with this unforgettable, triple-underlined kicker: "victory or death."

Six weeks after the Alamo fell, Texas won its independence at the Battle of San Jacinto, where the Texas soldiers, shouting, "Remember the Alamo!" killed several hundred Mexicans, while losing only nine of their own. As governor of Texas, Bush installed a portrait of Sam Houston, commander of the Texas forces at San Jacinto and then President of the Republic of Texas, clad in the costume of the Roman consul Gaius Marius, in his office in the state capitol. At Cooperstown, when Bush was asked about Nolan Ryan's pummeling of Robin Ventura, the first words out of his mouth were "Remember the Alamo!" In Boston, the day after hearing from Bush, the American team staged a remarkable comeback and won the Ryder Cup.

Another early Bush event—this one not only indicative but consequential—was a dinner in Chicago, on July 18, 2000, not long before the Republican National Convention, attended by Bush; John C. Danforth, who had retired as a senator from Missouri; his wife, Sally; and Dick Cheney, who left after performing introductions. Danforth had emerged from the Vice-Presidential search process, run by Cheney, as a leading choice, and this was an unannounced courtship dinner. The appeal of the choice is instantly clear. Danforth is distinguished, patrician, and thoughtful; he is an ordained Episcopalian minister; as a central figure in the Washington establishment, he had officiated at Katharine Graham's funeral; and he was a politician who could probably bring into the Republican column an important swing state, and who had a history of winning over Democratic voters. He had been one of the runners-up to Dan Quayle when George H. W. Bush was picking his Vice-Presidential nominee in 1988. Although he had only one conservative credential, it was of particular importance to the Bush family: in the Senate, he had successfully managed the controversial Supreme Court nomination of Clarence Thomas by the first President Bush.

But something didn't click at the dinner. A few days later, Bush announced that Cheney would be his Vice-Presidential nominee, and that decision had many ramifications. To begin with, if Danforth had been Vice-President, Donald Rumsfeld, Cheney's closest government associate, probably would not have become Defense Secretary, and John Ashcroft, another Missourian, probably would not have become Attorney General, so the Cabinet would not have had its most powerful, and most conservative, members. It was also a decision that seemed to reveal a number of Bush characteristics: his mistrust of Washington (Cheney, at that point, was living in Dallas), his dislike of being upstaged (Danforth is taller and more imposing than

Bush), his political confidence, even overconfidence (Cheney added nothing to the ticket electorally, in an election where Bush turned out not to have enough votes), his attraction to the person who presents himself as being merely a loyal servitor.

Last summer, I interviewed one of Bush's oldest friends, Clay Johnson, in connection with a "Frontline" documentary on the Presidential election, and heard a new version of Cheney's selection, one that reveals even more about Bush. Johnson—a Texan who met Bush at Andover and was his roommate at Yale, and who is currently a deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, having worked for Bush during his entire career as an elective officeholder—said that Bush had begun the Vice-Presidential selection process by offering the nomination to Cheney. "The now Vice-President declined the option, but did agree to head up the search committee," Johnson said. "And then came back some months later and said that in fact he'd changed his mind and he would be willing to run—to be the President's running mate." Johnson said he had a hunch about what had changed: "Lynne Cheney told some mutual friends of ours that she and Dick decided that in fact they did want to join the Bush ticket, because they came to really like George and Laura, and the Vice-President came to realize that the President wanted to come up here to really make a difference. He was not going to try to play it safe. Not try to extend an easy, moderately successful four years into an easy, moderately successful eight years. He was going to try to come up here and make dramatic changes to the issues he thought needed to be addressed. And the Vice-President got very, very energized and excited about doing that. And so now we have Dick Cheney as Vice-President."

In other words, the team that most people thought of as being made up of a moderate, conciliatory, relatively unambitious Presidential candidate and his bland, self-effacing, government technician of a running mate had thrown in together on the basis of a mutual decision to govern in pursuit of radical change. And they have done that.

Bush was a wildly popular governor of Texas, and a large part of his national appeal was that he had governed in partnership with Democratic legislators—that, to repeat two of his mantras from four years ago, he was "a uniter, not a divider" and was going to end the "partisan bickering" in Washington. In retrospect, everyone should have been paying more attention to the strikingly changed correlation of political forces in Texas—when Bush left office, there were no Democratic statewide officeholders, and both houses of the state legislature were on their way to having permanent-seeming Republican majorities. Still, the state seemed collectively thrilled at the prospect of Bush's election to the Presidency. Bush himself, overconfident as usual, plainly believed that he was going to win. Congress Avenue, the main downtown boulevard in Austin, was set up on Election Night for an enormous party.

In the ensuing electoral chaos, Bush appeared truly upset at first (his usually flawless physical appearance was marred, for the only time I can remember, by a boil that sprouted on his face), and then went through a phase of manic joking with visitors to the Governor's Mansion and musing about assembling a genuine coalition government, with several Democrats in the Cabinet. Finally, he retreated to his ranch in Crawford while a cadre of family loyalists did what needed to be done in his name.

The pattern—the initial bobble, the retreat, and the super-aggressive comeback carried out by tough-guy surrogates—seems to be a well-established one for Bush. His predecessor as governor, Ann Richards, whom Bush beat in 1994, told "Frontline"'s Martin Smith, "I never saw a tougher campaign than the one when George Bush was the candidate. I wouldn't suggest to you that George Bush does it all himself, because he doesn't. A lot of it is done behind the scenes. So I would say George Bush's organization is the toughest I've ever seen."

His response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, exemplifies the pattern perfectly: Bush did not perform outstandingly on September 11th itself, with his delayed reaction to the news, his flying around the country for most of the day, his three shaky television appearances, and his effective ceding of immediate decision-making authority to Cheney. But within ten days he had emphatically declared that the United States was engaged in a global war on terror.

In the earliest days of the Administration, it wasn't clear that Bush would reject a moderate Presidency. In December, 2000, he held a meeting in Austin, with Democrats present, to discuss education reform; he was both charming and knowledgeable, and his visitors came away impressed. Then, not long after his inauguration, Bush held a White House screening of the movie "Thirteen Days," about the Cuban missile crisis, partly as a way of fostering a warm relationship with Senator Edward Kennedy, of Massachusetts, whose brothers were lionized in the movie, and who is the most important Democratic senator when it comes to education issues. Several Kennedys, including the Senator, attended the screening, and it looked as if a happy across-the-aisle partnership had begun. Both Kennedy and George Miller, of California, who was the crucial Democratic member of the House of Representatives on the subject of education, and who had also been at the Austin meeting in December, decided to support Bush's big education initiative, No Child Left Behind, which in the spring passed both houses of Congress with overwhelming majorities. (Miller is as unapologetically liberal as Kennedy, and also as gregarious, and therefore was susceptible to the Bush laying on of hands.) It's a sign of how important a victory on the final bill was for the Administration that on the morning of September 11th Bush was in Florida at an event meant to promote the education bill, and to help nudge the state more firmly into his column in 2004. At the same time, Laura Bush was with Ted Kennedy at the Capitol, where she was to testify before the Senate education committee, also to promote the bill.

In Texas today, the prevailing mood in the political community, and especially among the old Democratic allies of Governor Bush, is one of head-shaking wonderment over where the Bush they knew went. Brutal state-legislative redistricting after the 2000 census left several of Governor Bush's Democratic allies in existential peril. And the state legislature has spent much of its energy since Bush left for Washington trying to fix what now seem intractable problems in the state education system that somehow didn't seem so when Bush was running for President. In Washington, Kennedy and Miller are feeling profoundly wronged, and, since the passage of No Child Left Behind, Bush has not tried to build comparable bipartisan support for any domestic initiative. He went from being a landslide-generating politician in Texas to being a toss-up-generating politician nationally, and from being a seeker of the middle ground with Democrats in Texas to being a rightward pusher of the political boundaries in Washington.

By supporting Bush, Kennedy and Miller were doing him a big favor, and taking a risk, because they were going against the natural inclinations of one of the most important interest groups in the Democratic Party, the teachers' unions; for Kennedy and Miller, supporting No Child Left Behind was what supporting a new tax would be for Bush. They went along because they believed that the bill, by setting tougher national standards for public schools, would help children; and, more to the point, they came away from their talks with Bush believing that he was going to pour new federal funding into the schools. They could tell the unions that they had got a lot more money for education in exchange for the standards and the extensive new testing regime that went with them.

Once the bill passed, there were no more chummy phone calls from Bush or invitations to the White House for Kennedy and Miller, and then, when the next federal budget came out, in January, the amount allotted to No Child Left Behind was ninety million dollars less than Ken-

nedey and Miller felt they had been promised. Subsequent budgets brought the same pattern: no contact with the White House, and funding far below what Bush had indicated he would commit. The Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, has referred to the biggest teachers' union as a "terrorist organization." Today, the public-school world is up in arms and Kennedy and Miller have to take heavy, constant fire from their old allies.

I spoke with Miller in Boston during the Democratic National Convention, and he was much angrier than elected politicians usually allow themselves to be on the record. "You fly with your eyes wide open here," he said. "I knew exactly what I was doing. When a person breaks their word—that's it. You're not gonna buy a horse from that guy again. He said it was a thoroughbred." He went on, "They don't consult with the nations of the world, and they don't consult with Congress, especially the Democrats in Congress. They can do it all themselves. They don't want to take anybody's advice on anything. It's the same isolation that got them into trouble in Iraq. They find the basic tenets of democracy—very inconvenient."

Part of the problem for Miller and Kennedy is the difficulty of communicating their version of what happened, because it entails a broken promise—a promise that was spoken and therefore unenforceable—to increase federal education spending by an even greater amount than it was increasing already. So the Administration can express innocent mystification, in a way that's hard to refute, over what the Democrats are so upset about. When I interviewed Karen Hughes, Bush's communications adviser—a woman compared with whom everyone else, even members of the Bush family, is disloyal and off-message—she told the education story as another example of the betrayal of the President by perfidious Washington Democrats.

"The only thing I can say is that you can reach out, but somebody else has to take your hand," Hughes said, with an air of being terribly disappointed, though not quite disappointed enough for her over-all amiability to be reduced. "And I came to Washington and watched him reach out. And, unfortunately, I don't think the hand was always returned. For example, he reached out to Senator Ted Kennedy, and worked with Senator Kennedy closely on education reforms. And they were able to pass the law. Now Senator Kennedy criticizes those reforms, saying there's not enough funding. Well, the dollars have increased by forty-nine per cent under the term of President George Bush. That's a big increase even for a liberal from Massachusetts!" She laughed merrily.

The one Democrat in Bush's Cabinet, Norman Mineta, the Secretary of Transportation, is rarely visible to the public. Of the more moderate Republican members of the Cabinet, Christine Todd Whitman, at the Environmental Protection Agency, and Paul O'Neill, at the Treasury, have left, and Colin Powell, at the State Department, is ever more obviously an outsider. Appointments to federal commissions that are statutorily required to go to Democrats have gone unfilled. On September 20, 2001, when Bush made his war-on-terror speech to a joint session of Congress, he gave a big bear hug to Tom Daschle, of South Dakota, the leader of the Senate Democrats, on his way out of the House chamber—a gesture that, made by a master politician, with the whole world watching, was surely not accidental. Daschle supported the emergency spending measures that Bush proposed after the September 11th attacks, and, earlier, he did Bush a favor by joining other senators in not taking up the Congressional Black Caucus's resolution demanding a recount of the 2000 Presidential-election results in Florida. Since then, Bush Administration officials have visited South Dakota a number of times to campaign for Daschle's defeat. His program for ending the partisan bickering in Washington appears to consist of trying to insure that there are as few people as possible in elected office who might be inclined to bicker with him, and ignoring those who remain.

Bush was born on July 6, 1946, in New Haven, Connecticut, into about as sociologically com-

fortable a berth as one can imagine. The United States was the most powerful nation in the world, and his own extended family was in a wonderfully favorable position within it. His father was a war-hero student at Yale, which his father, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, and several uncles and cousins had attended before him; when George H. W. Bush was tapped for Skull and Bones, a few months after George W. Bush was born, he was the fifth member of his family to receive that honor. The family seat was in Greenwich, Connecticut, one of the wealthiest towns in the country; George W.'s mother, Barbara, had grown up just a short distance away, in Rye, New York, a town almost as prosperous, and in a family almost as prominent. George W. Bush's grandfather Prescott Bush was a managing partner of Brown Brothers Harriman, the Wall Street investment house, whose headquarters were situated in a marble building in downtown Manhattan, and was also a director of at least six corporations, including CBS and Prudential Insurance. Prescott Bush had got his job through George Herbert Walker, his father-in-law and the namesake of both Presidents Bush. Walker retired from the firm to his estates to enjoy a life of investing and sportsmanship.

The Bush family had been helped in the railroad business in Columbus, Ohio, by a member of the Rockefeller family, and the connection persisted over the generations. There was also a deep connection to another of America's principal plutocratic families, the Harrimans. When George W. Bush was six, his grandfather, who was a leader in the campaign to persuade Dwight Eisenhower to run for President, was elected to the United States Senate from Connecticut. There was almost no place that mattered in business or politics, in the United States or Europe, that was out of the Bush family's range.

An important part of what politicians—first-rank politicians, anyway—do is make fully realized dramatic characters out of themselves, who exist in an intimate relationship with the voting public. The character has to bear some relation to the real person, of course, but it is still a genuine act of creation. Bush has done this impressively, making himself, despite his background, the antithesis, and enemy, of "élitists": his conversion from high-church Episcopalian to fundamentalist could serve as the shorthand for this long-running process. James Robison, the Dallas television evangelist, told Martin Smith that in Bush's view it was God's will that he leave the humble life of a small-town Texan to run for President. As Robison recalled, Bush said, "I want to be remembered the rest of my life, when I walk into Wal-Mart to buy bass lures, as 'This used to be our governor. His dad was President.' That's it." Then, by way of explaining the upgrading of his ambitions, Bush said to Robison, "I believe I'm supposed to" seek the White House. Implausible as it may seem, Bush appears sincerely to think that the character he was describing to Robison is who he really is.

"The disdain that George W. Bush and his brother Jeb have for America's élite institutions is genuine and deeply felt," Peter Schweizer and Rochelle Schweizer write in their fascinating family-insider book, "The Bushes: Portrait of a Dynasty." Even the imperturbable Laura Bush, when I interviewed her, displayed a flash of annoyance at a question that she obviously read as a cultural put-down from a secular East Coast snob. I asked her whether people who are serious about their religious faith could disagree about the morality of abortion. With a tight smile, she replied, "I don't agree with your premise that people of faith have to be serious. Or that people of faith aren't tolerant. You're just wrong. There are people all over the world who have very, very strong faith that are tolerant. And, in fact, people with a really strong faith, I think, are more tolerant."

This kind of bristling plainly isn't being faked, but Bush's anti-élitism can also be seen as a manifestation of his very strong power drive. As the Schweizers observe, the world Bush was born into was the epicenter of the Republican Party then, and it isn't now. Al Gore carried Connecticut in 2000, and John Kerry will likely carry it in 2004; Westchester County, New York, where Barbara Bush grew up, is now the political seat of the Clintons, and it votes

Democratic, too. In becoming a martially conservative, tax-cutting, fundamentalist-Christian businessman from the Southwest, Bush has moved in the same direction as his party has during his lifetime (and he will move it further while he is at its helm). If he had been élite in the manner of his grandfather, rather than élite in the way he is now, he would not have had much of a political career.

Bush seems to have begun disliking élitists when he was a student at Yale. Yale presented to him a tableau that was different from the one his father encountered: the students and faculty were starting to become markedly more intellectual and more liberal. It's also the case that George H. W. Bush was the exemplar of everything the institution cherished at the time he was there, and that George W. Bush was not. But Bush has not, to say the least, abandoned the idea of himself as a member, not to say the undisputed leader, of the authority-holding group in America. Occasionally, a sign escapes from Bush's world to indicate that it isn't quite as down-home as it appears. Clay Johnson offered this comment, out of an A. R. Gurney play, about John Kerry as a young man: "For what it's worth, I know he wasn't popular. People just didn't like him. Very self-serving, very vain. Wouldn't pass the puck. Catch my drift? He was booed at his fortieth St. Paul's reunion." The master life strategy for Bush has been to leave the game he can't win and create a new one that he dominates.

Accounts that seep out of this very un-leaky White House present it as an almost anti-egalitarian environment. Bush likes being President. "This is fun!" he tells people sometimes, with boyish enthusiasm, but he makes an effort to create a feeling of authority around himself. He never appears in the Oval Office dressed informally (and almost never appears on the campaign trail dressed formally). People call Bush "the President," even behind his back. They stand when he enters a room. Bush genially complains, in a way that indicates less than complete displeasure, about the deference people show him in the Oval Office, even people who have come intending to criticize or disagree with him. He is often short-tempered and demanding with his staff, and he both insists on and receives total loyalty. One never expects to see blind quotes in the newspapers from inside the Bush campaign criticizing key staff members or even the candidate himself, such as one regularly sees from inside the Kerry campaign; all the people in the Bush campaign's high command work only for Bush, and not for any fancy fees, either.

In his first spring as President, Bush returned to Yale to deliver the commencement address. The trip was billed as a demonstration of the fact that he didn't have a problem with Yale after all, but, typically, he extracted a special fealty from the institution as a condition of his coming. He received an honorary degree (something that Yale didn't award his father until near the end of his term, despite a vigorous lobbying campaign by George W. Bush). In addition, he was honored, as the President, by being allowed to break Yale's long-standing tradition of not having a commencement speaker. And then he gave a speech, to an audience many of whose members were leaving Yale with heavy tuition debts, in which he fondly recalled how unseriously he'd taken his education there. Like a lot of talented politicians, Bush in a crowd can demonstrate a real love, a need, for people, but in other settings he needs, rather, to display a kind of animal superiority. He teases, he touches, he goads, he sends a wink or a cold stare, he bestows nicknames, and, in this campaign, of course, he relentlessly attacks. In general, he insists, with amazing success, on conducting discussions on terms that he alone has set, and on the assumption that reality is what he alone has declared it to be (for example, his recent assertion at the U.N. that "today the Iraqi and Afghan people are on the path to democracy and freedom"). And, in deciding to run first for governor and then for President, he was not troubled by his lack of what would customarily be considered a full measure of experience and preparation. Bush usually tries to establish himself in a position in which he has as much control as possible, and he usually tries to get there not by the normal

patient route but by behaving so aggressively that a more direct path opens up.

When someone gravitates so strongly away from the usual back-and-forth of human relations, it can be taken as a sign of confidence—or of insecurity. Despite the fortunate circumstances of his birth, Bush, like everybody else, has sustained his share of wounds. When he was seven years old, his younger sister, Robin, died, and her illness kept his parents away from home a lot. George and Barbara Bush were unusually busy parents anyway; in Ron Suskind's book about Paul O'Neill's brief, unhappy tour in the Bush Administration, there is a story about O'Neill's wife, Nancy, who, seated next to the President at a dinner, tries to make conversation by asking him what was the meal he most liked his mother to prepare when he was growing up. Bush replied, "You got to be kiddin'. My mother never cooked. The woman had frostbite on her fingers. Everything right out of the freezer."

The Schweizers present the senior Bushes as openly having higher expectations for their second son, Jeb, than for their eldest. (They quote George H. W. Bush saying of his son George, "He is good, this boy of ours," and of Jeb, "There is no question in my mind that he will become a major political figure in the country.") They report that, on Election Night in 1994, when Bush won the governor's race in Texas and his brother lost the governor's race in Florida, an aunt overheard him saying on the phone to his father, in the middle of what was supposed to be the big congratulatory phone call, "Why do you feel bad about Jeb? Why don't you feel good about me?" Bush was never a star student—the Schweizers quote another close relative as saying she thinks that he has attention-deficit disorder—and his life up to middle age was not especially affirming. It is a mark of his political skill that, in the 2000 campaign, he successfully turned a thin résumé into a redemption story of an ex-drinker who found God, but, still, he has rarely had a happy experience in situations where he was not completely in control, and had to deal with others as peers and follow preëxisting rules.

A well-worn White House talking point about the Bush-Cheney relationship is that it is especially solid because the Vice-President has had several heart attacks and that keeps him from having Presidential ambitions of his own. But why is this an important point for Bush? Was his father made intensely uncomfortable by the possibility that Dan Quayle might run for President one day, or Bill Clinton by Al Gore's ambitions? The Bush family has a reputation for being unusually preoccupied with loyalty and unusually insistent that staff people know their place. And George W. Bush seems more that way than the other Bushes. A very funny scene early in Richard Ben Cramer's book about the 1988 Presidential campaign, "What It Takes," shows Bush blowing his stack when he sees his father's White House chief of staff, Craig Fuller, sitting in what he regards as a family seat at a baseball game, and, without a second's thought, loudly complaining about Fuller's presumptuousness. That kind of assurance shows a deep sense of comfort with being in the superior position, but not necessarily a deep sense of self-confidence.

I asked Laura Bush to give a thumbnail description of her husband, as if she were a novelist introducing a character. Here's what she said: "Well, my husband has a great sense of humor. He's very funny. He's gregarious. He likes people. He loves to be with people. He remembers people. He's very aware of the story of people. When he meets people, he asks them about themselves. . . . He's very quick. He's quick-witted. He's very quick with the one-liners. He's funny that way. . . . I think maybe he got that characteristic, learned to be sort of the wise guy, to make his parents laugh, when his little sister died when he was seven." She went on, "And he's very competitive. He's competitive as an athlete. And he's competitive as a person, of course, needless to say. You know, you have to be very competitive to run for political office." In conclusion, she said, "He's very strong. And he's tough. And these are times that require people who are very strong."

On the night of September 11th, when Bush walked into the Presidential Emergency Operations Center, underneath the White House, he said, according to Richard Clarke, who was then the National Security Council's counterterrorism expert, "We are going to kick some ass." By September 12th, as several accounts have made clear, talk had begun inside the Administration about the possibility of war with Iraq. Clarke describes Bush's buttonholing him on the twelfth and saying, "See if Saddam did this. See if he's linked in any way." On the afternoon of September 11th, Rumsfeld had sent a note to General Richard Myers about the possibility of striking back at Iraq. That weekend, when the War Cabinet gathered at Camp David, Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, pushed for a military move against Iraq.

The idea of removing Saddam Hussein from power had been circulating in the Bush Administration even before September 11th. Bill Clinton and Al Gore were notionally committed to "regime change" in Iraq; Bush was looking for a way to make the Iraq policy more aggressive. O'Neill describes a meeting of the National Security Council on January 30, 2001, that was devoted, inconclusively, to this subject. Deciding to invade, conquer, and occupy Iraq is by far the most consequential thing that Bush has done as President, and it's frustrating that we don't know, and probably won't for years, exactly when, how, and why he made the decision.

Bob Woodward's two most recent books, "Bush at War" and "Plan of Attack," give the most detailed account of the path to war. Woodward's theory is that when Bush privately instructed Rumsfeld to update existing war plans for Iraq, on November 21, 2001, it set things inexorably in motion. Bush could have stopped the momentum toward war, of course, but he chose not to. When I asked Laura Bush about the timing, she said, "I don't know if I can tell you exactly when he made that decision. But I would say the decision was slow in coming, and with very deliberate—with every angle looked at. And that's the decision you would expect any President to make when he puts American troops in harm's way."

O'Neill has said it was his impression that Bush had made up his mind about Iraq by the time he took office. Cheney told a friend that he expected that Bush had decided by the time he gave his "axis of evil" speech, in January, 2002. Richard Haass, who was, until June, 2003, the head of the policy-planning staff in the State Department and a key adviser to Colin Powell, says that, by the summer of 2002, the Administration had "lit the fuse" on the Iraq issue. Haass is now president of the Council on Foreign Relations, and not long ago I went to see him there to talk about the war. I asked him why, fundamentally, Bush had decided to go to war.

"I will go to my grave not knowing that," Haass said. "I can't answer it. I can't explain the strategic obsession with Iraq—why it rose to the top of people's priority list. I just can't explain why so many people thought this was so important to do. But, if there was a hidden reason, the one I heard most was that we needed to change the geopolitical momentum after 9/11. People wanted to show that we can dish it out as well as take it. We're not a pitiful helpless giant. We can play offense as well as defense. I heard that from some people. Of course, some would say that Afghanistan was enough. There are two what-ifs. One, what if there had been no 9/11—would it have happened? I think the odds are slightly against it, even though some people were for it. Two, what if we knew there were no weapons of mass destruction? I'd say no. But the urge to do this existed pre-9/11. What 9/11 did was change the atmosphere in which decisions were made. The only serious argument for war was weapons of mass destruction."

The lack of clarity about Bush's decision is important, and it has a lot to do with why things

have gone so badly in Iraq after the quick, impressive military victory. The President who screened "Thirteen Days" at the White House obviously did not conduct the kind of exercise depicted in that film, in which a President, at the brink of war, elaborately seeks all possible information, tries to expose himself to every argument, and debates with his top officials the consequences of every possible course of action. In the hundreds of pages of Woodward's books, nothing like this ever happens.

Richard Clarke told Martin Smith, "He doesn't reach out, typically, for a lot of experts. He has a very narrow, regulated, highly regimented set of channels to get advice. One of the first things we were told was 'Don't write a lot of briefing papers. And don't make the briefing papers very long.' Because this President is not a reader. He likes oral briefings, and he likes them from the national-security adviser, the White House chief of staff, and the Vice-President. He's not into big meetings. And he's not into big briefing books." Clarke added, "The contrast with Clinton was that Clinton would hold a meeting with you. And he read your briefing materials. But also, having read your briefing materials, he would have gone out and found other materials somehow. He would have directly called people up. Not people in the government, necessarily. Experts, outside the government. Or he would have found magazine articles, or—or books on the subject. So that, when you were briefing him, frequently you had the feeling that he knew more about the subject than you did. And he wasn't showing off. He had just done his homework." By contrast, Bob Woodward told me that, during an interview he conducted with Bush in December, 2001, he asked the President whether he ever sought advice about the war on terror from distinguished figures outside his Administration, such as Brent Scowcroft, his father's national-security adviser. Woodward told me that Bush said to him, "I have no outside advice. Anybody who says they're an outside adviser of this Administration on this particular matter is not telling the truth. First of all, in the initial phase of this war, I never left the compound. Nor did anybody come in the compound. I was, you talk about one guy in a bubble." Bush said, "The only true advice I receive is from our war council," and he added, "I didn't call around, asking, 'What the heck do you think we ought to do?'" In August, 2002, Scowcroft wrote an op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal opposing the idea of war in Iraq. Such a move seemed uncharacteristic for an inside player like him, but he obviously felt that doubts about Iraq, even coming from someone with his bona fides, couldn't get a private hearing in the Bush White House.

Haass reminded me that he had gone to see Condoleezza Rice, the national-security adviser, in June to express doubts about going to war, and came away with the impression that the decision had already been made. Afterward, he reported to his boss, Colin Powell, what Rice had said. By August, Powell had come around to the view that the war couldn't be headed off. He decided that his best chance was to influence how it was done, not whether. He argued passionately for going to Congress and the United Nations, and he persuaded Bush. Shortly after Scowcroft's article appeared, Cheney made a fiery pro-war speech at a Veterans of Foreign Wars convention. So it was Scowcroft and Cheney, not Powell and Bush, who were conducting the fundamental debate.

The war in the War Cabinet was unusually intense even by Washington's high standards. Bush's advisers like to describe him as an M.B.A. President, or a C.E.O. President—someone who isn't afraid of surrounding himself with strong figures, and who firmly sets a general direction while leaving the details to others. The problem with this description is that people who run effective organizations don't let their underlings squabble endlessly, so that fundamental questions are unresolved for months. They also don't relegate matters of the utmost urgency, such as the initial decision on who was to be in charge of the reconstruction of Iraq, to the level of details to be worked out by others. Before the war, virtually everyone who knew anything about Iraq was warning, loudly, that achieving a conventional military victory would be, relatively speaking, the easy part of the operation. The hard part would be making

Iraq function as a coherent democratic nation afterward, because of its history of ethnic division, violence, and resistance to central governmental authority. Bush doesn't seem to have spent much time worrying about that.

Even when Bush was governor of Texas, he liked allowing his top aides to argue heatedly in his presence. Accounts of such scenes are sketchy, but what they evoke is a discussion in which things don't get sorted through and resolved. Bush is the dominant presence—a position that he establishes by asking a few pointed questions, by giving very broad over-all signals, or by simply allowing other people to fight openly for his favor—but he does not either guide or take part in the exchange that would lead to a decision. In the early days of his Presidential campaign, Bush was introduced by his new circle of policy advisers to a Washington institution called a “murder board,” in which a politician's aides fire hostile questions at him as a method of preparing for the rigors of public appearances. Bush resisted, and had to be talked into it. He prefers to assemble a group of friendly people from the conservative movement, who are profoundly grateful for being granted time in his presence, and to free-associate about the issues of the day—tuning up the instrument, as it were—while they listen. And, in trying to figure out his position on an issue, Bush, like a lot of other politicians, doesn't so much analyze as look for a hook—a phrase or a way of framing the issue that feels instinctively right to him. In his case, instinct usually takes him to a position where he is in charge and everyone else has to adjust.

The long period of preparation for the war in Iraq now appears to have been devoted more to justifying a foregone conclusion than to actually preparing—except in the case of the invasion itself. The Administration's hawks relentlessly pushed for higher intelligence estimates of the threat that Saddam Hussein represented and for lower military estimates of what the invasion and the occupation would require. Haass, who was frozen out by the hawks, said, “There were a lot of loaded assumptions about the analysis: The aftermath would be a lesser included case of the war. The Iraqis would see the coalition as liberators and they'd be welcomed. Those who didn't buy in were excluded. People who raised implementation questions were seen as backdoor critics of the war.”

When Bush went to the United Nations in the fall of 2002 and obtained a resolution that got weapons inspectors back into Iraq, it was more as a concession to Powell than as a thought-through Administration policy. The hawks, who had always been contemptuous of the U.N., were dismissive of the inspection process. (A little-noticed nugget in Woodward's “Plan of Attack” is that the Administration spied on Hans Blix, the chief U.N. weapons inspector, while he was doing his work.) The Administration was unable or unwilling to get the heads of state of the other Security Council members to agree at the outset on what they would consider an unacceptable result from the inspections. So on the eve of war, when Bush declared the result unacceptable, the nations that were capable of sending large numbers of troops to Iraq didn't agree with him and refused to help, which is one reason that the occupation of Iraq has been so expensive and has stretched the U.S. military past its limits. The Administration consistently pushed every aspect of Iraq policy—intelligence-gathering, diplomacy, military strategy, foreign-policy doctrine, and, of course, the treatment of prisoners—into a new realm of statecraft, characterized by a total and, it has turned out, excessive faith that pure force would produce far better results than anyone had previously realized. Bush's advisers urged him in this direction, but he chose which advisers to hire and to listen to. It was really a natural outgrowth of who he is.

In the current Presidential campaign, Bush has expertly drawn attention away from how high a price the United States has paid for the war in Iraq. It is difficult to find anybody in Washington, in either party, who will seriously defend Bush's management of Iraq. Most of

the available armed forces of the United States are pinned down in a place that represents a threat chiefly because American troops are there. That limits American options in places that pose much more genuine threats. The reputation of American intelligence agencies has been badly damaged—would anyone now heed warnings from them? It is increasingly difficult to imagine other major powers joining the United States in an international endeavor, even one that isn't a war. The government's financial resources are depleted. The U.S. military in Iraq has started trying to take back areas of the country now controlled by insurgents, and it may not be safe enough there for the scheduled elections to be held in January. The country still has no meaningful army or police force. It doesn't seem that there will be, any time soon, a way to extract the American forces without risking Iraq's descent into chaos, of a kind that would be both dangerous and humiliating to the United States and would betray Bush's repeated promises to bring the Iraqis a better life.

The Bush campaign has taken the discussion of the war, whose specifics are so unfavorable to him, to the much more propitious level of generalization: Democrats and the international community are incapable of responding to evil and to danger: Don't you feel safer with Bush in the White House? When I talked with Karen Hughes, I asked whether President Bush still feels that Saddam Hussein's regime represented enough of a threat to justify war. She gave an answer that was a version of something Bush often says: "I think he feels that Saddam Hussein was a threat to America, and that the risks in a post-September 11th world—knowing what we know after September 11th, that there are terrorists who hate us, that we had a tyrannical dictator who hated us, who we know had at least the capability of developing weapons of mass destruction, because he had done so in the past and had used them in the past, and knowing that we have terrorists who want to gain access to those weapons—yes, we did the right thing. We have to view those kinds of threats as the very, very serious threats that they are. Because the nightmare scenario that we're going to face, unfortunately, I think, for decades to come, is that these terrorists, who want to sow chaos and want—they want to murder. That's what they want to do. They want to shock us and terrorize us and cause us to retreat. And the nightmare scenario that we have to prevent is that they would somehow access the means to do so on an even wider scale." This version of the war has Bush playing Nolan Ryan to Saddam's Robin Ventura—except in this case Ryan, sensing a gathering danger, rushes the plate to deliver his famous thrashing.

President Bush, Hughes remarked, "believes that you use campaigns to build support for the things you want to do when you're in office." This is true, and the constant barrage of charges (most of them flung by the Bush camp) in this campaign has obscured what Bush has set forth, on a separate track, as his goals for his second term. He is not secretive; quite often, he has laid out ambitious plans months or years before they were launched, in the texts of public speeches of the sort that Washington usually doesn't pay much attention to—so-called "major policy addresses." Bush likes to put down markers that permit him a great deal of latitude. During his first six months in office—before September 11th, that is—he changed things to a degree that one would associate with somebody who had won in a landslide, not in a tie. In Bill Clinton's last year in office, the federal government had a surplus of \$236.4 billion, and the surplus was rhetorically dedicated, for all time, to a metaphoric "lockbox" devoted to the two biggest domestic federal programs, Social Security and Medicare. Bush cut taxes to such an extent, even before the war on terror began, that the surplus was likely to evaporate (the government is now running a four-hundred-and-twenty-two-billion-dollar deficit), and the lockbox, supposedly a defining feature of American politics, is a distant memory.

Before September 11th, Bush unilaterally withdrew the United States from the Kyoto accords on global warming, and he had signalled a desire to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the International Criminal Court. He launched a program to develop mis-

sile defense, with a view to changing American nuclear strategy fundamentally. He avoided direct dealings with Yasir Arafat, of the Palestinian Authority, which was a departure from the practice of the Clinton Administration, and he committed the United States to defend Taiwan against attack, which represented a tilt against China that the previous six Presidents had chosen not to make. And he was trying to find a way to remove Saddam Hussein from power.

In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, Bush said, "We are staying on the offensive, striking terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home. And we are working to advance liberty in the broader Middle East, because freedom will bring a future of hope and the peace we all want. And we will prevail." This statement leaves Bush a lot of room for further maneuvering in the Arab world in a second term. Another act that received insufficient attention was his cutting off of relations, in 2003, with Muhammad Khatami, the elected head of state in Iran—whom the Clinton Administration had treated as a friend—which followed a year of openly wishing for the overthrow of Khatami's government. As Iran moves toward having nuclear weapons—the evidence is much clearer than it was in the case of Saddam Hussein—and increasingly exerts its influence in Iraq in a way that is harmful to American interests, it's hard to imagine that Bush won't feel he has to act. Pakistan is unstable (President Pervez Musharraf has survived multiple assassination attempts), and it has nuclear weapons. No President could allow Musharraf to fall and let Pakistan's weapons get into the wrong hands in the aftermath, and Bush would surely respond more forcefully, and less cautiously, than another President confronted with that situation.

Quite often this year, Bush has wondered publicly about the desirability of fundamental changes in the tax system and in Social Security. He doesn't speak about the deficit as a problem to be solved, and that is probably because he doesn't regard it as such. Instead, the prevailing view in the White House seems to be that big government deficits might actually be a force for good, because they make it impossible for government to grow. (In this respect, Bush is much more like Ronald Reagan than like his father, who raised taxes to close the deficits that Reagan policies had helped create and, partly as a result, lost his reelection campaign.) Bush is already trying to make permanent some early tax cuts that were passed with expiration dates, and that would increase the deficit more. He has also speculated during campaign appearances about abolishing the progressive income tax in favor of a flat tax, or replacing the income tax altogether, with a national sales tax or a value-added tax, like the one he proposed unsuccessfully in Texas in 1997. During his first term, he appointed a little-noticed commission on the future of Social Security, which has called for phasing out the existing system of universal government-administered retirement benefits and phasing in personal retirement accounts. (Bush has called for some variant of this idea in every State of the Union address.) Even Republicans in Congress balked, and nothing happened; but now the Administration is planning a campaign to change Social Security along the lines that the commission recommended. The prescription-drug-benefit bill that Congress passed last year has a provision—which, again, didn't get much notice—to do the same thing in health care, by establishing individual "health savings accounts" as an alternative to the government's guaranteeing medical coverage.

Bush, unlike his father, is drawn to big, landscape-changing ideas, and—also unlike his father—he thinks like a politician. Much of what he has planned for the second term is meant to serve the goal of making the Republican Party as dominant in national politics as Bush's foreign policy means to make the United States in world affairs. The Democrats are the party of government; systematically reducing government's ability to provide services, its employment base, and its role as a provider of the two most essential guarantees, pensions and medical care, cuts off the Democrats' oxygen supply. In his first term, Bush has won confirmation for two hundred and one of his two hundred and twenty-six appointees to the federal judiciary—all but two of them Republicans—and in a second term he would likely get the op-

portunity to appoint as many as three Supreme Court justices.

In early 2000, writing about Bush in these pages, I said that he seemed to want to become President very badly, but that he did not seem to want to do a lot once in office. Boy, was I wrong! If the voters give Bush a second term, he would, it seems, govern with the goal of a Franklin Roosevelt-level transformation—in the opposite direction, of course—of the relation of citizen to state and of the United States to the rest of the world. He would pursue ends that are now outside what most people conceive of as the compass points of the debate, by means that are more aggressive than we are accustomed to. And he couldn't possibly win by a smaller margin than last time, so he couldn't possibly avoid the conclusion that he had been given a more expansive mandate.

Shouting "Remember the Alamo!" the Texans ran at the Mexican soldiers. Eighteen minutes later, the battle was over. Santa Anna's army was destroyed. On May 14, 1836, Texas's President David Burnet and General Santa Anna signed a treaty. The treaty made Texas independent from Mexico. Historian Daniel Feller says President Jackson had to be careful when responding to the situation in Texas. The Remember the Alamo trope as used in popular culture. A Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far Far Away (well, actually Texas in 1836) roughly two hundred years - Create New - Analysis Characters FanficRecs FanWorks Fridge Haiku Headscratchers ImageLinks PlayingWith Quotes Recap ReferencedBy Synopsis Timeline Trivia WMG YMMV. Remember the Alamo unknown. A phrase that could be compared to that of "Never Forget, (9/11)" In a nutshell, it means, "The army of Santa Anna (Mexico) took the Alamo, so we'll take their lives!" One could use it as a sort of motivation for those around them, when a situation seems hopeless. It is also a movie, based on the same events surrounding Davy Crockett, the Alamo, and the Army of Santa Anna. "My friends, we must remember the Alamo!" #remember #the #alamo #davy #crockett.