

President	George W. Bush
Chronological Order	43
Life Span	1946-present
Home State	Texas
Elected	2000, 2004

Political Party	Republican
Vice President	Richard B. Cheney
First Lady	Laura Welch Bush
Children	Two daughters

Physical Attributes	5'11.5" tall, brown hair, blue eyes
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Undergraduate Education	Yale University (History). He also received an M.B.A from Harvard Business School.
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Military Service	Pilot in the Texas Air National Guard
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Profession	Oil Industry Executive, Baseball Team Owner
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Political Offices	Governor
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Nickname	W or Bush 43
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Family Lineage	English, German
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Religious Affiliation	Methodist
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Biographical Notes	<p>1. George W. Bush was one of the worst presidents in American history. In 2000, he won a highly questionable election that many Americans considered to be fraudulent. When he came into office in 2001, the estimated budget surplus was \$5 trillion over the next ten years. Bush's massive tax cuts and huge military budgets turned this projected surplus into a \$6 trillion deficit. In foreign policy, he used false pretenses to get Congress to declare war on Iraq in 2003 – there were no weapons of mass destruction. His unilateral decision to try to establish a democracy in Iraq, instead of pulling American forces out quickly and letting the Iraqis determine their form of government, led to an insurgency that lasted eight years, claimed the lives of more than four thousand American soldiers, and cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Bush's approval of the use of torture on al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners drew international outrage and endangered American soldiers. His personnel choices for various financial positions and overarching antipathy towards financial regulation created a climate that, if it did not trigger the Great Recession of 2008, almost certainly aggravated it.</p>
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2. George W. Bush spent the first part of his life trying to emulate his father and failing to do so. At Yale, George H. W. Bush graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a degree in economics in two and a half years; George W. majored in history, had a C average, and did poorly in his economics and political science classes. At Yale, GHWB was the starting first baseman and captain of the varsity baseball team, which went to the College World Series; W was an infrequently used relief pitcher on the freshman team. GHWB was a decorated World War II bomber pilot; during the Vietnam War, W was a pilot in the Texas Air National Guard, never left the U.S., and was suspended from flying for failure to take a scheduled physical exam. GHWB was a successful oil executive – a millionaire before the age of thirty; W did not have great success as an oil industry executive.

3. Bush entered Harvard Business School in 1973 and graduated with an MBA in 1975. He had fifty-three job interviews with Fortune 500 companies but received no job offers. A fellow graduate said, "He is the only Harvard Business School graduate that I know who ever left there without a goddamned job."

After Harvard, Bush returned to Texas and began working in the oil business as a landman, someone who



researched land titles and mineral rights in county courthouses and then went door-to-door, representing oil companies trying to lease those rights from the owners. By 1977, Bush had done sufficiently well as a landman to organize his own company, Arbusto Energy, to invest in leases for himself. (Arbusto is Spanish for "bush.")

In 1978, Bush surprised the Republican and Democratic establishments by deciding to run for Congress in the 19th Congressional District. He showed natural talent as a campaigner and defeated ultraconservative Jim Reese for the Republican nomination. However, registered Democrats outnumbered Republicans six to one in the district, and Bush lost the general election.

Arbusto began active operations as a corporate investment vehicle in 1979, and Bush raised \$565,000 from twenty-eight limited partners. In 1980, with oil moving up to \$30 a barrel, Bush raised another \$1.24 million from thirty-six investors, and in 1981 he raised an additional \$1.72 million. By 1984, Bush's limited partners had invested \$4.66 million and had received \$1.54 million in cash distributions in return. They also received \$3.89 million in tax write-offs, which would have netted them another \$2.91 million. Bush said, "I was slowly but surely building a solid, small producing company, and I thought we'd developed a reputation as honest operators who worked hard and gave people a fair shake. But I'm not going to pretend that it was a huge success at the time."

In the spring of 1982, Bush took Arbusto public and changed the name to Bush Exploration. He had hoped to raise \$6 million but drummed up only \$1.2 million. Bush later said, "Going public was a mistake. We weren't prepared for it. We didn't raise any money; we weren't able to get enough exposure. ... I made a bad mistake." In 1983, Bush's problems intensified. The company didn't find much oil or gas and was not raising much money. The entire industry was in trouble with oil prices plummeting, and Bush Exploration was hit particularly hard.

In 1984, two wealthy Cincinnati investors who owned Spectrum 7, a larger oil and gas company based in Texas, was looking for a Texan who knew the oil business to head their operations. In February 1984, Bush Exploration and Spectrum 7 merged to form a new Spectrum 7 with Bush as chairman and CEO. By the spring of 1986, the new Spectrum 7 was in trouble. The price of oil, which had held steady at \$20 a barrel, began a steep decline. Within six months, it was down to \$9 a barrel. Banks failed, and people with debt went under overnight. Spectrum 7 lost \$2 million and owed \$3.1 million in bank loans. The threat of foreclosure appeared imminent. Bush found a larger company, Harken Oil and Gas, willing to absorb Spectrum 7. Part of Harken's motivation was that it wanted George – with his name value – on their board.

4. In 1988, William DeWitt Jr., a friend with connections in Major League Baseball, told W that the Texas Rangers were up for sale, and that Commissioner Peter Ueberroth was insisting that the team be bought by investors from Texas. DeWitt and Bush put together a group of investors that bought the team for \$75 million. Bush was named managing general partner, even though he only invested \$600,000, because he was well-known enough to be the "face" of the franchise. After the city of Arlington committed \$135 million to build a new ballpark, the worth of the franchise soared.

Bush was popular during the five years he ran the team. Unlike most owners, who sit up high in air-conditioned skyboxes, he liked to sit in the box seats right behind the home team dugout, where he would eat hot dogs, talk to the fans, and sign autographs for them. Bush made it a point to sit through all nine innings, no matter the score, no matter how brutal the summer heat. He publicized the team by giving speeches about the family experience at the ballpark to numerous organizations in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. For the most part, he left player personnel decisions to his baseball people. When his partners sold the team in 1998, his share was worth \$15 million.

5. Bush worked for eighteen months on his father's 1988 presidential campaign. At first, he served as his father's surrogate at events too distant to fit into the vice president's schedule. Then he became the campaign's chief liaison with the powerful evangelical wing of the party. Above all, he was a handy conduit between the campaign staff and George H. W. Bush.

During the campaign, W received a crash course in practical politics from two GOP heavyweights: campaign manager Lee Atwater and media consultant Roger Ailes. Atwater and Ailes had the offices on either side of Bush's, and he and Atwater became close friends. After the election, W convinced his father to reward Atwater with the chairmanship of the Republican National Committee.

6. Jeb Bush, W's younger brother, was reliable, diligent, and relentlessly focused – all things that W was not as a young man. Consequently, over the years it was assumed in the family that Jeb would be the son to follow his father into politics. Hence, when W considered a run for governor of Texas in 1990, his parents

opposed the idea – especially his mother. She told one of GHWB's aides, "You tell George not to run!" When that failed to settle the matter, she called a group of reporters into the White House and offered her discouragement for the record: "I'm hoping, having bought the Rangers, he'll get so involved he won't do it." W was furious because he felt she thought that a loss by him would hurt Jeb's future chances. In the end, he decided not to run.

In 1994, Jeb ran for governor of Florida, and W ran for governor of Texas. Again, Barbara Bush did not support W's decision. At Thanksgiving in 1993, she yelled at him that he would soak up contributions Jeb needed in Florida. After all, Jeb was favored to win, and W was an underdog to the Democratic incumbent, Ann Richards. But W was a natural politician – he enjoyed meeting people and had an excellent memory for names – and Jeb was not. W won, and Jeb lost. In his hotel suite on election night, with everyone celebrating, W was overheard talking to his father on the phone: "Why do you feel bad about Jeb? Why don't you feel good about me?"

7. Bush's win-at-all-costs political advisor Karl Rove engineered the victory. Rove started a statewide whispering campaign that Richards, who had appointed many women and minorities to statewide office, was a lesbian. On the Sunday before election day, an inflammatory flyer appeared on car windshields in church parking lots all across East Texas. The flyer contained a picture of a shirtless black man and a shirtless white man kissing with the caption "This Is What Ann Richards Wants to Teach Your Children in Public Schools."

8. Since the era of Reconstruction that followed the Civil War, Texans have subscribed to the doctrine that the government is the best that governs least. There is no state income tax; the legislature meets for 140 days every other year, and the governor's powers are extremely limited. He has veto power over the legislature; he may call the legislature into a special session on a particular issue and appoints roughly a thousand members of state boards, commissions, and task forces. He is the commander-in-chief of the state's military forces. But, unlike the president of the United States, he is not charged to ensure that the laws are faithfully executed because Texas has a plural executive branch system. In this system, all the other executive officers (e.g., the secretary of agriculture, the secretary of transportation, ...) are directly elected by the voters, not appointed by the governor. Hence, they are directly answerable to the people of Texas, not the governor.

Consequently, the governor of Texas is a head of state, like an English monarch, not the CEO of the state. He is a player in the legislative process. His office is a bully pulpit. He can lead public opinion and mobilize it for particular purposes, and he symbolizes state authority. But he does not have a lot of power in terms of getting things done, which makes Texas's governorship one of the nation's weakest.

George W. Bush thrived in this setting. As a candidate for governor, W promised to pass legislation in four areas: tort reform, welfare reform, greater accountability in education, and stricter juvenile justice laws. As governor, he befriended Texas Speaker of the House Pete Laney and Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock, who presided over the state Senate. He worked closely with them – both were Democrats – to form large legislative majorities that passed legislation in the four areas he had promised. When the legislature was in session, the three men breakfasted together, and the things they discussed did not leak out. Bush enjoyed being governor and did an excellent job. He was reelected in 1998 with a record 69 percent of the vote.

9. In 1998, GOP leaders started encouraging Bush to run for president. He was flattered, but did not, at first, want to do it. In the summer of 1998, he said to an aide, "I'm just not gonna do this. I want my girls to have a normal life."

The morning of his second inauguration as governor, he sat with his family in an Austin church waiting for what he had assumed would be an obligatory prayer service. But the pastor had something else in mind. He declared, "People are starved for leadership. Starved for leaders who have ethical and moral courage. ... And it's not always easy or convenient to step forward. Even Moses had doubts." The sermon moved Bush – he felt that the words were intended for him – and he decided to run for president.

10. After declaring his candidacy, Bush built up a massive war chest, \$35 million in the first four months, mostly from wealthy donors. He won the Iowa caucuses handily.

The New Hampshire primary, however, was a different matter. Here, Senator John McCain became very popular, because, unlike Bush, he was willing to take questions from the voters and give thoughtful answers. Also, McCain got great press coverage because he allowed the correspondents on his bus – the "Straight Talk Express" – to ask him as many questions as they wanted to. McCain soundly defeated Bush 50 to 32 percent.

Consequently, the following primary in South Carolina was crucial to Bush. He had to beat McCain, or else his bid for the presidency could be over. Bush did two things that enabled him to win. First, he poured cash

into the state, outspending McCain by a margin of 10 to 1. Second, he and Rove conducted what the New York Times called a "smear campaign" against McCain. The Bush campaign used brutal negative attack ads and push polls that characterized McCain as a cheat, a liar, and a fraud. Rumors were floated that the senator had a black child out of wedlock, and fliers materialized on car windshields at McCain events featuring a photo of McCain holding the presumed black love child. (It was his adopted Bangladeshi daughter Bridget.) At a Bush event, with W standing nearby, an unscrupulous former military man slandered McCain's loyalty to veterans, and when he finished, Bush shook his hand. When other veterans demanded that Bush condemn the remarks, Bush said, "He's entitled to his own opinion." Bush crushed McCain 53 to 42 percent and went on to win the Republican nomination.

11. On election night in 2000, the race between Bush and Al Gore was so close that the winner of Florida would win the election. After an automatic machine recount in Florida, Bush won by 327 votes out of almost 6 million cast. Gore demanded a hand recount in Miami-Dade County, because of voting machine problems there. The Florida State Supreme Court ordered a hand recount in that county, and the three-member Miami-Dade Canvassing Board began the recount. Then something unprecedented in American politics happened.

Congressman John Sweeney, a Republican from New York, led a group of paid Republican operatives to the sight of the counting, with the mission – in the words of Sweeney – to "shut it down." They pushed people out of the way and started banging on the doors and windows of the rooms where the votes were being counted, raising the specter of physical violence.

Wall Street Journal columnist Paul A. Gigot reported that during the incident, which became known as the Brooks Brother Riot, the Republican operatives "let it be known that a thousand local Cuban Republicans were on the way." That scared the three members of the canvassing board, who "caved" as Gigot put it, reversing their previous determination to recount with the sudden decision to stop counting. In other words, a mob succeeded in shutting down a recount requested by the Florida State Supreme Court.

In the meantime, the Bush team, furious with the Florida Supreme Court decision, appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. That court, voting strictly along party lines, voted 5 to 4 to stop the hand recount, thereby giving the election to Bush.

12. As a young man, W tried to emulate his father. As president, he went to great lengths to behave just the *opposite* of the way his father had as president. His father was hurt politically when he broke his pledge of no new taxes; W pushed record-breaking tax cuts through Congress. His father lacked the "vision thing"; W would have a vision.

Where his father was engaged in the details of policy, the son saw himself as a leader who did not concern himself with minutiae. His father was methodical, slow to choose a course, and capable of changing his mind. The son was an instantaneous "decider" who "went with his gut" and did not revisit his choices or change his mind. His father was criticized (in some circles) for being too prudent and nice. The son would be bold and blunt, like his mother. He told people he wanted to be a "consequential" president, not the manager of an inbox like his dad.

Seeing the big picture instead of managing the inbox gave W permission to know as little as he wanted to, and as little as he did about every issue other than education (his specialty). Unlike his father or Bill Clinton, Bush did not discuss the nuances of policy questions with his cabinet secretaries at great length. By and large, policy questions were brought to him by members of his inner circle for a yes or no decision, and he made those decisions without detailed discussions with the principals.

13. Bush had run for president as a "compassionate conservative" in 2000 and had touted his ability to work with Democrats in Texas. But the polling data from the 2000 election showed that the "swing vote" had dwindled from 24 percent in 1980 to only 6 or 7 percent. Hence, in future elections exciting the base would be far more crucial than wooing the swing vote.

After Rove decided that exciting the conservative base was more important than wooing the swing vote, he began to use wedge issues to divide the electorate. For example, he promoted vigorous anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage agendas to cement evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics to the base. Since these issues were so emotional, dissenters were often vilified as nonbelievers who condoned murder and did not respect the sanctity of marriage. Terrorism was another wedge issue. According to Rove, anyone who disagreed with Bush's handling of the war on terror was unpatriotic.

A third wedge issue was union membership. Bush and Rove relentlessly pursued a three-pronged anti-union agenda. First, Bush issued, after one month in office, executive orders that undercut union activities by

making it more difficult for them to attract members. In particular, new regulations required unions to report, in excruciating detail, how they spent their money on politics, whereas corporations were not required to do the same. Second, he replaced National Labor Relations Board members with union busters. Third, Bush and Rove supported efforts to privatize government jobs and exempt federal workers from collective bargaining.

The results of using these wedge issues were increased partisanship and greater polarization between the two political parties.

14. Rove played an unusually large role in the administration for a political consultant, because Bush chose to integrate politics and policy to win more convincingly in 2004. Bill Clinton called his political consultant, Dick Morris, to the White House infrequently, and Bush's father relegated Lee Atwater to the RNC. But Rove had a West Wing office and played a significant role in shaping domestic policy.

In the White House, Rove oversaw: (a) the Office of Political Affairs (OPA), (b) the Office of Public Liaison (OPL), (c) the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (OIA), and (d) the Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI). The objective of the OPA was to grow Bush's power by selecting and promoting GOP candidates in battleground states. The OPL staged 400 events per year to build coalitions and push the President's agenda. The OAI interfaced with mayors and governors. The OSI served as an in-house think tank.

15. During the last few years of the Clinton administration, the booming economy produced revenue surpluses, and on the campaign trail, Bush promised to return "the people's money" with a tax cut plan. True to his word, the first significant legislation passed by Bush was a massive – \$1.35 trillion – tax cut package. These tax cuts and the administration's huge increase in military spending were the primary causes of the rise of the national debt from \$5.8 trillion in 2001 to \$11.9 trillion in 2009.

The principal beneficiaries of the Bush tax cuts were those in the higher tax brackets. Forty-five percent of the reductions went to the wealthiest one percent, while only thirteen percent went to the least affluent sixty percent.

16. The primary focus of First Lady Laura Bush – a former librarian – was education, and she championed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The act supported standards-based education reform based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals could improve educational outcomes. It required states to develop assessments of basic skills. States had to give these assessments to all students at selected grade levels to receive federal funding. The bill had bipartisan support. The vote was 381 to 41 in the House and 87 to 10 in the Senate.

17. Early in Bush's presidency, he addressed climate change by calling for legislation to require mandatory reductions of greenhouse gases from power plants, including carbon dioxide. To implement the changes, he chose Christie Todd Whitman to head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) because she had a proven track record of fighting for environmental causes as the governor of New Jersey.

At the 2001 G-8 meeting of environmental ministers, Whitman announced that the United States was preparing to list carbon dioxide as a toxic substance, which would allow the EPA to cap its emissions. The announcement caused a firestorm in the Bush administration. Dick Cheney, a former oil company CEO, protested that a ban on carbon dioxide emissions would exacerbate the country's energy problems. Karl Rove feared its impact on the GOP base. Industrial leaders warned of its adverse effects on the economy. Without consulting the EPA, or the Treasury Department, or the State Department (who all supported the ban), Bush completely reversed himself and announced: "I do not believe that the government should impose on power plants mandatory emission reductions for carbon dioxide, which is not a pollutant under the Clean Air Act."

Whitman remained in the administration for another two years, a lonely moderate surrounded by conservative ideologues. Shortly after leaving office she wrote, "The administration's insistence on playing strictly to the base in explaining the president's opposition to ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, coupled with his reversal on the regulation of carbon dioxide, was an early expression of the go-it-alone attitude that so offended our allies in the lead-up to the Iraq war."

18. Before 9/11, the Bush White House ignored repeated warnings from credible sources about the terrorist threat Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden posed. During the transition, Sandy Berger, Clinton's National Security Advisor, told Condoleezza Rice, Bush's National Security Advisor, "You're going to spend more time during your four years on terrorism generally and Al Qaeda specifically than any other issue." Rice did not reply. Richard Clarke, the career civil servant who headed the National Security Council's Counterterrorism and

Security Group, briefed Rice on Al Qaeda in January 2001 and also found her unresponsive. According to Clarke, Rice “viewed the NSC as a foreign policy coordinating mechanism and not someplace where issues such as terrorism in the U.S. or domestic preparedness ... should be addressed.” Under Bush, Clarke’s position was downgraded, and the issue of terrorism and Al Qaeda was passed off to the deputies.

At the meeting of the deputies, when Clarke pressed for action against bin Laden, Bush aide Paul Wolfowitz objected, “I don’t understand why we are beginning by talking about this one man bin Laden.” When Clarke replied that only bin Laden and Al Qaeda posed an immediate threat to the U.S., Wolfowitz maintained that the Iraqi terrorist threat was even greater. Clarke pointed out that there had been no Iraqi threat to the U.S. since 1993, and the deputy director of the CIA agreed. Wolfowitz continued to focus on Iraq. “You give bin Laden too much credit. He could not do all these things ... without state sponsorship.”

The warnings of George Tenet, Director of the CIA, were also ignored. In February, Tenet told the Senate, “The threat from global terrorism is real, it is immediate, and is evolving. ... Osama bin Laden and his global network remain the most immediate and serious threat.” On May 30, Tenet, Cofer Black, the CIA’s counterterrorism chief, and Clarke told Rice, “The mounting warning signs of a coming attack are truly frightening.” On July 10, Tenet and Black again met with Rice to present CIA intercepts of Al Qaeda communications. “There will be a significant terrorist attack in the coming weeks or months. Multiple and simultaneous attacks are possible, and they will occur with little or no warning.” Clarke agreed, but Rice brushed off the warning.

The Rice NSC staff also dismissed the warning of outgoing Deputy National Security Advisor Don Kerrick. Just after the inauguration, he told Rice, “We are going to be struck again,” but she never responded. Later, Kerrick commented, “Terrorism was not high on their priority list.”

19. On August 6, 2001, Bush was vacationing at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and a CIA briefer gave him a presentation entitled “Bin Laden Determined to Strike the U.S.” This was one of forty-four intelligence reports from the agency mentioning the Al Qaeda threat that Bush received before 9/11 and was by far the most alarming. The report noted that after the unsuccessful U.S. missile strike on his base in Afghanistan in 1998, Osama bin Laden planned to retaliate and “bring the fighting to America.” According to the report, “Al-Qa’ida members – including some who are U.S. citizens – have resided in or traveled to the U.S. for years, and the group maintains a support structure that could aid attacks.”

The CIA said that in 1998 bin Laden was reported to have announced that he wanted to hijack U.S. aircraft, and while they could not confirm that, “FBI information from that time indicates a pattern of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for hijacking and other types of attacks.” The report concluded by noting that the FBI was “conducting approximately seventy full field investigations throughout the U.S. that it considers bin Laden-related.” Bush made no response. Instead, he left work early and spent most of the day fishing.

20. On September 11, 2001, al Qaeda attacked New York City and Washington, D.C. They hijacked four commercial airliners, crashing two into the twin towers of the World Trade Center and a third into the Pentagon. The target of the fourth plane was the U.S. Capitol Building, but it crashed in a field in Pennsylvania when the passengers stormed the hijackers who were in control of the aircraft.

Bush did a good job leading the country in the weeks following the attack. He told the world, “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.” Since the Taliban government of Afghanistan was harboring al Qaeda, Bush demanded that they arrest the terrorists and shut down their camps. When the Taliban failed to do this, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in November 2001. The invasion had broad support from the American public.

Unfortunately, when Bush later declared war on Iraq, resources were diverted from Afghanistan to Iraq. Consequently, the Taliban was never totally defeated. In 2022, The U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan, and the Taliban reclaimed control of the country.

21. In the days following September 11, the spirit of the country was low and needed to be uplifted. On September 14, Bush visited “Ground Zero” in New York City, where the twin towers had fallen. Dressed casually in a windbreaker, W climbed up on top of a fire engine and began to use a bullhorn to address the crowd of first responders. He started slowly and was interrupted when someone shouted, “I can’t hear you!”

The comment energized Bush, and he shouted, “I can hear you!” and the crowd burst into applause. He continued: “I can hear you! The rest of the world can hear you! And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!” The crowd exploded with woofing noises and cries of “U-S-A! U-S-A! U-S-A!” and demands that George should go get them.

A similar thing happened seven weeks later when Bush went to Yankee Stadium to throw out the first pitch at a World Series game. Bush got there early, and, in the tunnel, he encountered the great Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter. Jeter said, "Hey, Prez, are you gonna throw it from the mound?"

"What do you think?" Bush asked.

"Yeah. Be a man. Throw it from the mound," Jeter replied.

"Okay, I will," Bush responded.

After beginning to walk away, Jeter turned back around and said, "Just don't bounce it. They'll boo you."

When his name was announced, Bush walked to the mound as 57,000 fans cheered. When he got to the pitching rubber, he gave a thumbs up, then went into his windup and let the pitch go. It passed over the center of the plate, belt-high – a perfect strike. The crowd erupted, shouting "U-S-A! U-S-A! U-S-A!" and everyone watching – in person or on television – got the feeling that everything would be alright.

22. After 9/11, the White House braced for a deadly encore, knowing al Qaeda's tendency to launch a follow-up attack. In October, a letter containing anthrax spores reached the Capitol Hill office of Senator Tom Daschle. Within the next two weeks, the offices or the mailing sites of ABC, CBS, NBC, the Justice Department, the State Department, several senators, and the White House received contaminated letters. Most of the envelopes also contained a note dated 09-11-01. Several such notes said, "Death to America. Death to Israel. Allah is Great." Bush, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and others in the administration believed al Qaeda was behind the letters. After two months, the White House concluded publicly that the anthrax case was likely a domestic operation. But the anthrax attacks had a significant impact on the administration because they validated its fear of weapons of mass destruction.

Ultimately, eighteen people were infected, and five died. After an extensive investigation, in 2008 the Department of Justice and the FBI concluded that all the anthrax letters had been mailed by a mentally deranged microbiologist working for the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases in Frederick, Maryland.

23. On October 15, 2001, the CIA received the first of three dossiers that attempted to show that Iraq may have tried to purchase "yellowcake" uranium from the African nation of Niger. This information came from SISMI, Italy's intelligence agency, which had also shared it with France, Germany, and Great Britain. The French, who controlled Niger's uranium mines, considered the intelligence unreliable and dismissed the claims, as did the Germans. The U.S. State Department also disregarded the allegations, citing the fact that the French would have been aware of any deal for large amounts of uranium. Subsequently, the CIA sent former ambassador Joseph Wilson to Niger, and he found no evidence of a uranium deal with Iraq.

In the meantime, the Bush administration was looking for an excuse to invade Iraq. After all, according to Bush, Iraq, North Korea, and Iran formed an "axis of evil" that was a threat to the rest of the world. Also, Saddam Hussein tried to assassinate George H. W. Bush during the former president's visit to Kuwait. Consequently, the administration used the Niger dossiers – later proven to be based on forgeries – to assert that Saddam was trying to build a nuclear weapon. Congress then granted Bush the power to invade Iraq, which he did in March 2003.

24. The military phase of the war was brief – the Americans routed the Iraqi army in three weeks. But the follow-up – getting the nation back on its feet with a functioning government – was mishandled by the Bush administration. Initially, the plan was to do a rapid drawdown of American forces and allow the Iraqis to determine their future. But Bush unilaterally – without consulting the State Department or the Department of Defense – changed the objective: he demanded that democracy be established in Iraq, which would require an American occupation.

To begin setting up a democracy, he appointed an all-powerful presidential envoy, Paul Bremer, to take control of Iraq. Bremer had no experience in the Middle East, did not speak Arabic, and had never run anything larger than an embassy. Bremer made two huge mistakes. First, he outlawed the Baath Party. Since tens of thousands of Iraqis in government service were party members, this removed the people who were holding the country's fragile infrastructure together. Moreover, since the Baath party was a strong secular force, once it was removed, sectarian strife – Sunnis versus Shiites – developed.

Bremer's second mistake was disbanding the Iraqi army. Overnight some 385,000 soldiers, plus 285,000 employees of the Ministry of Interior – the home of the police and the domestic security services – were without jobs. Abruptly terminating the livelihoods of these men created a pool of humiliated, antagonized, and politicized men, many of whom were armed. One American officer commented, "That was the day we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory and created an insurgency." The American occupation lasted eight years. No weapons of mass destruction were ever found.

25. Joseph Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, was an undercover CIA agent. To discredit Wilson's assertion that Niger did not sell uranium to Iraq, Scooter Libby, Dick Cheney's chief of staff, spoke with a reporter, outing Plame and claiming that she got the Niger assignment for Wilson. When investigators asked Libby about his source regarding Plame's secret identity, Libby lied to protect his source: Dick Cheney. Libby was convicted of two counts of perjury, one count of obstruction of justice, and one count of lying to an FBI agent. He was sentenced to 30 months in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and 400 hours of community service. President George W. Bush commuted his prison sentence.

26. In the election of 2004, Bush was vulnerable, because the economy was weak and the Iraq War was unpopular. The Democratic candidate was Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts. Kerry's wife was the fabulously wealthy Teresa Heinz, heiress of the Heinz food conglomerate. Bush and Rove painted Kerry as a flip-flopping, out of touch patrician, and the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth," a group of disgruntled Republican Vietnam veterans, slandered Kerry's war record. Kerry responded too slowly to the attacks and never took advantage of the weak economy. Also, Bush and Rove cleverly framed the election as a choice between the two candidates, not a referendum on Bush's presidency. On election day, the race was so close that the winner of Ohio would win the election. Bush won by a narrow margin.

27. After the election, Bush made the privatization of Social Security his number one domestic priority. He went on a "60 Cities in 60 Days" tour to educate the public on the topic, and put enormous pressure on Republicans in Congress to support the measure. The people, however, strongly opposed the proposal, and it went nowhere.

28. Bush decided to deny al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners the protections of the Geneva Conventions. In particular, he approved "enhanced interrogation techniques," i.e., the use of torture, to try to obtain information about future terrorist attacks. For example, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Abu Zubaydah were waterboarded 183 and 83 times, respectively. In Bush's mind, it was a war of good versus evil, and no holds were barred.

Senator John McCain, who had been tortured as a prisoner during the Vietnam War, strongly objected to the American use of enhanced interrogation techniques. He wrote legislation prohibiting the use of torture, and gave a stirring speech in the Senate to promote what was referred to as the McCain Amendment:

Where did the brave men I was privileged to serve with in Vietnam draw the strength to resist the cruelties inflicted upon them by our enemies? Well, they drew strength from our faith in each other, from our faith in God, and from our faith in our country. Our enemies did not adhere to the Geneva Convention. Many of my comrades were subject to very cruel, very inhumane and degrading treatments, a few of them even unto death. But every one of us – every single one of us – knew and took great strength from the belief that we were different from our enemies, that we were better than them, that we, if the roles were reversed, would not disgrace ourselves by committing or countenancing such mistreatment of them.

Bush strongly opposed the McCain amendment. But more than two dozen retired generals and admirals wrote an open letter of support for it. The bill that contained the McCain amendment passed in the Senate by a vote of 90 to 9, and passed overwhelmingly in the House as well. Bush signed the bill because he felt that McCain had the votes to override a veto. However, in his signing statement, Bush proclaimed that the prohibition of torture did not apply to the CIA. McCain and others expressed outrage at this, and Bush's approval ratings plummeted.

29. Hurricane Katrina, which occurred in August 2005, was the costliest natural disaster, as well as one of the five deadliest hurricanes, in the history of the United States. Among recorded Atlantic hurricanes, it was the sixth strongest overall. Approximately eighteen hundred people died in the storm and subsequent floods.

The Bush administration's response to the hurricane was an epic failure, and much of the responsibility belongs to Bush himself. The day before the storm struck, Bush was on a working vacation at his Crawford, Texas ranch, and he sat in on a video conference with experts discussing the coming hurricane. There were hard questions that needed to be asked – questions that addressed the nightmare scenario of what would happen if the levees in New Orleans were breached. But the president did not ask these kinds of questions. After giving some brief introductory remarks, he listened to the others, said nothing, and then returned to his

vacation. He assumed that FEMA director Mike Brown, a political appointee with no prior experience in emergency management, would take care of everything. In contrast, a detailed-oriented president like Eisenhower, or Carter, or Bush 41, or Clinton would have asked good questions and provided leadership for the administration's response.

The next day Bush flew to political events in Arizona and California, unaware of the breaches in the New Orleans levees and the fact that 80 percent of the city was underwater. When he did find out the following day, he still did not return to Washington to take control of the response.

In the meantime, the rising water trapped hundreds of people on the rooftops of their houses for days, and tens of thousands went to the Superdome for shelter and, hopefully, a bus ride out of town. But the busses didn't come; drinking water didn't come; sanitation facilities broke down. And all this played out on television, for the entire world to see. For some Americans, Katrina was a political tipping point for Bush – after this, he could not be trusted to do what was needed when it mattered.

30. The electorate turned against Bush in the midterm elections of 2006 – the GOP lost control of both the House and the Senate. The Republican majority of 232 to 202 (plus one independent) in the House became a 233 to 202 Democratic majority. The GOP lost six Senate seats; the final tally was 49 seats each, plus two independents that caucused with the Democrats. Bush declared, "It was a thumpin'."

31. The Great Recession of 2008 occurred at the end of Bush's second term. It began with the subprime mortgage crisis when banks became overextended due to questionable investment practices. The resulting loss of wealth during the crisis led to sharp cutbacks in consumer spending. This loss of consumption, combined with the financial market chaos triggered by the bursting of the mortgage bubble, also led to a collapse in business investment. As consumer spending and business investment dried up, massive job loss followed. In 2008 and 2009, the U.S. labor market lost 8.4 million jobs or 6.1% of all payroll employment. This was the most dramatic employment contraction, by far, of any recession since the Great Depression.

Experts, from both political parties, say that Bush's early personnel choices and overarching antipathy towards regulation created a climate that, if it did not trigger the recession, almost certainly aggravated it. The president's first two Treasury secretaries, for instance, lacked the kind of Wall Street expertise that might have helped them raise red flags about the use of the complex financial instruments at the heart of the crisis.

Instead, various voices inside the administration who favored tougher policing of Wall Street found themselves with few supporters. For example, William Donaldson, a former Wall Street executive with respected Republican credentials, was chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission under Bush. But he resigned in 2005 after facing resistance from the White House and Republican members of the commission, who criticized his support for stiffer regulations on mutual funds and hedge funds.

The Bush administration bailed out the Wall Street banks with \$700 billion because it feared what would happen if the banks failed. At the same time, General Motors and Chrysler were on the verge of bankruptcy. Bush loaned them \$13.4 billion and \$4 billion, respectively, to tide them over until March 2009, at which point President Obama could decide how he would like to proceed.

Bush's moves did not halt the Great Recession, and when Obama came into office, the economy was in grave danger. Twenty-four days after his inauguration, Obama passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, a \$787 billion stimulus package that helped jumpstart the economy. Obama also helped halt the recession by taking steps that helped save the auto industry.

30. When a president leaves office, it has become a tradition that he refrains from criticizing his successor. George W. Bush strongly adhered to this policy. Even though he differed significantly from his successor on many policy issues and was sharply criticized by some in the Democratic Party, he never criticized Obama publicly during the Democrat's eight years in office. In retirement, Bush – like Eisenhower – took up painting as a hobby. He published a book, *Portraits of Courage: A Commander in Chief's Tribute to America's Warriors*, which contained photographs of sixty-four of his paintings honoring members of the military.

31. Being the governor of Texas was scarcely a full-time job because of the lack of executive responsibility. According to the *Texas Monthly*, Bush arrived at his capitol office at 8 a.m., left at 11:40 a.m. for the track at the University of Texas, where he ran three to five miles, and returned after lunch at about 1:30 p.m. If there were no appointments, he would play video golf or computer solitaire until 3 p.m., at which time the workday ended. "There were days when, to be honest with you, he was looking for something to do," said his old Midland friend Dr. Charles Younger.

See the next page for a list of references.

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