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Book Review **by Brigid O'Neil**

The Bush Betrayal by James Bovard
(Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); 336 pages; \$26.95.

The reelection of George Walker Bush rubs too much like the gruesome aftermath of a hit and run — made bearable only by our instinctual ability to self-medicate in numbness. For a first-stage coping mechanism — just ask the *Sopranos* psychiatrist — it works. For a long-term political strategy, however, it's nothing short of disastrous.

So now, faced with the prospect of another four years under President Bush rule, the opposition faces a do-or-die challenge to break the Sirens' song of big government with a clear clarion call for liberty. And it starts in the same place as it did in the last major social revolution: with a massive effort in public education.

James Bovard's latest book, *The Bush Betrayal*, could be the start. I know of no better way to prepare ourselves for the coming administration than to read some of the most important lessons gleaned from the past four years. It is this skeptical eye toward the historical legacy of the Bush II administration that Bovard uses as his compass. Truthfully, I have yet to read a book supplying more cause for political indictment and the exhaustive footnotes to support every last contention against the current political agenda. Right from the start, Bovard opens in rapid-fire succession on governmental failures surrounding 9/11.

In *The Bush Betrayal*, you'll read florid quotes from an administration representative extolling the virtue of a current public policy or priority, closely followed by a cold shower of hard evidence and contrary analysis. Bovard also finds amazing anecdotes and details you can't find — under one roof — anywhere else. Take the story of 54-year-old Brett Bursey, who held a sign of protest in a crowd gathered to hear the president speak in a Columbia, South Carolina, airport hangar. After local police had twice moved Bursey to a so-called free-speech zone, at one point more than 200 yards away from the speaking area, he refused to move again. Soon he was handcuffed and stuffed in the back of a paddy wagon.

I [saw] the whole tableau through the bars in the paddy wagon. He goes inside the hangar and gives this speech where he says they hate us because we're free, and here I am handcuffed in the back of a paddy wagon, thinking, "No, Mr. Bush, they don't hate us because we're free. They hate us because we're hypocrites."

The Bush administration policies Bovard chooses to tackle are almost exclusively hallmarks of old-school conservatism: free trade, national security, civil liberties, government spending, and national defense. By highlighting Bush's failure in traditional areas of conservative strength, Bovard makes the case for the administration's hypocrisies all the more transparent to the very intellectual constituency Bush relies on for support.

In essence, the style Bovard emulates is more suited toward fans who want a lot of opinion for the buck. Reading *The Bush Betrayal* is supposed to feel like a long discussion with a 20th-century journalist about a not-so-peculiar 21st-century political administration — not like a bland lecture from the nightly news. Like Seymour Hersh's scalding critique of the Abu Ghraib scandal in *Chain of Command*, Bovard brings back the bite to what has depressingly become a reticent and toothless American journalism. Witness this account of the president's responsibility in the Abu Ghraib scandal:

Regardless of whether Bush had personal knowledge of the outrages committed by his agents around the globe, he is culpable for the results of his doctrine of absolute righteousness sanctifying absolute power — at least over those Iraqis, Afghans, or others unlucky enough to be suspected of something.

Again and again the book recalls some of the brightest days of American journalism, where muckraking was less a nod to partisan interests than to democratic principles. For anyone in need of a wake-up call to the dire need for action and knowledge, there are few better antidotes than Bovard's piercing critique of the foibles of George Walker Bush.

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