The steady leadership of George HW Bush: a review essay of Destiny and Power

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PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH'S UNSUCCESSFUL 1992 reelection campaign prompted extensive scrutiny of his single-term presidency for shortcomings that may have contributed to the loss. From the failure to keep his "no new taxes" pledge to perceived insufficient attention to domestic, particularly economic, concerns, the Bush presidency seemed likely to be viewed historically as one of modest success--in essence, a footnote to the legacy of Bush's transformational predecessor, Ronald Reagan.

More than two decades later, after the far more controversial presidency of George W. Bush (the 43rd U.S. presidency) and the failed presidential campaign of Jeb Bush, the first Bush presidency (the 41st U.S. presidency) is regarded more favorably by scholars and the American public. A 2014 Gallup poll found that 63 percent of Americans viewed Bush 41 favorably, second only to Bill Clinton, at 64 percent, among living presidents. (1) A survey from the same year of political scientists studying the American presidency identified Bush 41 as one of the most underrated presidents, along with Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower. (2) Jon Meacham's new biography of George H.W. Bush's extensive political career, which included service in Congress, the United Nations, the Republican National Committee, the Foreign Service as envoy to China, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the White House for eight years as vice president before the presidency. In each of those positions, Bush's quiet leadership and diplomacy set the foundation for major policies enacted by more visible presidents.

As suggested by the book's title, Bush's career of leadership and public service in many respects fulfilled deeply held family expectations. The second of five children, Bush came from the economic elite, with both maternal and paternal family financial prosperity dating back to his grandparents. With their financial success came a belief in contributing to the community. As Meacham describes the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century, when Bush's paternal grandfather built his fortune through railroads, "the pursuit of wealth was thus imbued with a sense of purpose" (p. 8). Growing up in New England, Bush followed the traditional path of his family's social circle, excelling in both academics and athletics and attending boarding school as a teenager. His college plans changed, however, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Just as his father had served as a field artillery officer in World War I, Bush decided to join the American fight in World War II, entering the U.S. Navy to become a pilot. He suffered injury when his plane was hit in the Pacific but soon returned to duty, earning numerous awards for his military service. (4)

Having met and married his wife, Barbara, during World War II, Bush matriculated at Yale University in the fall of 1945, 21 years old and determined to do well--and to do so quickly. His view was typical of his cohort; as Meacham writes,...
Watch more. How SNL’s George HW Bush impersonation skewered the president. The cultish club, loosely similar to Oxford's Bullingdon, was founded following a dispute between competing clubs in 1832 by future businessman William Huntington Russell and Alphonso Taft, the latter Secretary of War under Ulysses S Grant and the father of 27th president William Howard Taft, who likewise joined its ranks. When asked what he could say about the significance of George W Bush and himself both being Bonesmen when they ran against each other in the 2004 presidential election, John Kerry answered: "Not much, because it's a secret". More about. George HW Bush. George HW Bush's presidency left the world a more peaceful and stable place. There is a convincing case to be made that George H.W. Bush was one of the greatest global leaders of all our presidents, writes Nicholas Burns, former U.S. ambassador to NATO. No other president came to the White House better prepared to lead internationally. Bush’s steady, civil bearing came through at the most challenging moments, including the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nicholas Burns. Published 7:01 AM ET Mon, 3 Dec 2018 Updated 3:51 PM ET Mon, 3 Dec 2018 CNBC.com. Jon George HW Bush has died at age 94 (AP Photo/Matt Sayles, File). Historians will measure the presidency of George H.W. Bush in familiar ways — by how well or poorly he managed the major domestic and international challenges of his time, his leadership qualities, the moral and social legacies he left for future generations. Yet, at the moment of his passing, it is difficult not to take note of the profound differences between the 41st president of the United States and the current occupant of the White House, Donald Trump. Beyond a desire to be president — Bush was more