

In *Marching in Place*, *Time* magazine White House correspondents Michael Duffy and Dan Goodgame set out to do a disciplined and unbiased job of appraising George Bush's presidency and wind up losing control of themselves along the way. The authors promise to "judge Bush's performance not against the expectations of critics on the right and left, but by the standards of his own promises and rhetoric." They point to Bush's deep belief in the essential goodness of America and its institutions—as they are—and conclude that the "common criticisms that Bush 'lacks conviction' or 'doesn't believe anything' are not quite right. . . . If one looks instead at what he does—and does not do—a core of solid convictions emerges."

They report that Bush's inaugural address, laced with such words as "stewardship," "continuity," and "continuum," made clear that this would be a custodial administration, one of "day-by-day reactivity," and they quote former Bush drug policy chief William Bennett on the President's indifference to the potential of his office for stirring political debate and moving the country in his ideological direction. To Bush, says Bennett, such public arguments "weren't the real work of the president. . . . The real work of the president was reading the paperwork and making decisions." They describe his speechwriters' frustration at trying to lend power to the oratory of a man far more interested in making sure he salutes, by name, all the local VIPs in the room at the start of every address.

So far, so good—these are all telling illuminations of Bush's innate aversion to change and his preoccupation with personal relationships. The authors also

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MARCHING IN PLACE:  
THE STATUS QUO PRESIDENCY  
OF GEORGE BUSH

Michael Duffy and Dan Goodgame

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reviewed by BRIT HUME

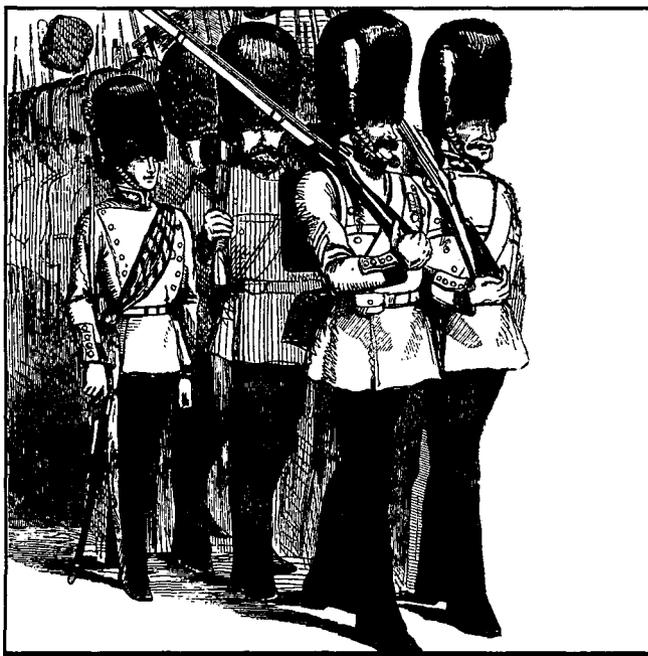
provide fascinating details about such events as John Sununu's last days, and deft sketches of various White House officials, such as national security adviser Brent Scowcroft. But the book soon degenerates into hatchet work that is almost laughably crude. In the midst of an otherwise straightforward description of the President's outlook at the time of the Persian Gulf crisis, there suddenly occurs this: "When he surveyed the home front, Bush was basically content. His relatives, friends and campaign contributors were doing just fine." That comes about halfway through the book. By the final chapter, the President described in chapter three as having "a core of solid convictions" has become the "stand-for-nothing president." In a

chapter on Bush's economic policy, all pretense of neutrality is abandoned in favor of what sounds like an AFL-CIO pamphlet from the 1950s. The President, say the authors, has pursued a "class agenda that has not changed much in 30 years." The authors accuse Bush of pursuing not only a—here it comes—"trickle-down economic policy," but also a "trickle-down social agenda."

In the 1990 budget deal the authors see "a bipartisan sellout of the working class." What particularly galls them, though, is not the new taxes in the budget deal but the restrictions on spending—"complex provisions . . . which effectively froze the federal budget into rigid categories. Under these strictures, cuts in defense spending could not be used to finance tax cuts or new spending programs." What this means, they report indignantly, is that "Bush and Congress erected unprecedented barriers to government's ability to deal with social, economic and international changes . . ." It does not seem to matter to the authors that this Republican President doesn't believe the budget is necessarily the best instrument for dealing with such things.

They have long since stopped judging him on his own terms.

The authors' political bias is glaring. The Reagan years are a time of "gluttony and callousness." Senator Jesse Helms is referred to as "the Republican extremist." In a chapter on John Sununu's role as Bush's bad cop, Duffy and Goodgame explain that "Sununu ran interference when Bush needed to shuffle to the right on such issues as judicial appointments or abortion, absorbing the blame for Bush's latest pander to his party's extremist wing." Why Bush's unwavering stand as both Vice President and President against abortion and his consistent promise and practice of



appointing judicial conservatives are a "shuffle to the right" or a "pander" is not explained.

It is true that there is an "extremist wing" in the Republican party, but Jesse Helms, whatever you think of him, is not part of it. Neither is the anti-abortion movement nor the people who want conservative judges. (There is one Bush appointee who is regarded by some in the party as an extremist, and that's EPA chief William Reilly. Richard Darman, for one, thinks so and privately derides the handsome Reilly as an "international rock star." To Duffy and Goodgame, though, Reilly represents "mainstream environmentalism.")

If the authors' failure to support critical assertions is striking, their factual sloppiness is inexplicable. On day five of the Gulf crisis, Bush returned from Camp David to be met on the White House lawn by national security staffer Richard Haass, who handed him a sheet of paper. Bush read it, then went to the waiting microphones to denounce Iraq. Duffy and Goodgame report this as follows: "Bush found Haass waiting with a summary of the latest developments in

the Gulf, including evidence that a withdrawal from Kuwait that Saddam had announced was a fraud." That's certainly how it looked, but it's not what happened. According to numerous officials, including Haass, Bush had known for hours that Saddam's promised pullout was a fake and had been urged by spokesman Marlin Fitzwater to say something about it. Fitzwater couldn't get to the White House in time to meet the President, so he and Haass developed a set of "talking points" for Bush to make on his arrival. It's those "talking points" that Bush was given on the lawn that Sunday. Numerous reporters at the White House that day got the same impression Duffy and Goodgame did, but those who checked their facts—and a lot of reporters did—found out what actually happened.

The authors assert that, despite his denials, the President decided on day one of the Gulf crisis to "intervene militarily." They do not specify what they mean by "intervene," but convey the unmistakable impression that the President was eager for a war to test his greatness. Just when Bush decided to use force against Iraq has

been a matter of considerable debate and speculation, and it's important. On it turns the question of his motivation and whether he deceived the public and Congress about his intentions. But beyond saying that Bush asked for "military options"—a standard procedure—Duffy and Goodgame provide no evidence or detail to buttress their contention.

Similarly, they accuse the President of "exaggerating the nature of the threat Iraq posed to Saudi Arabia." He had a better chance of getting the Saudis to permit U.S. forces on their soil, the book claims, "if he hyped the possibility of an attack on Saudi Arabia." The authors provide not a single fact to support this allegation. They say that both Saudi Prince Bandar and King Fahd were shown satellite reconnaissance pictures, but that well-known fact hardly strengthens their charge of exaggeration, especially since the photos showed Iraqi forces massed on the Saudi border.

When President Bush gave his State of the Union address last January, he set forth an economic program that included the idea of raising the personal income tax exemption by \$500. But, the authors write, the President

abandoned his own tax plan almost as quickly as he had cobbled it together. Less than a week after the speech, his aides asked the Ways and Means Committee to adopt a narrower package of seven tax incentives. . . . Missing from this list was the proposal to increase by \$500 the personal exemption for families.

The episode was damaging. First reported by the *Washington Post*, this "bait and switch," as the authors call it, was picked up by a New Hampshire newspaper, and became part of a scathing primary commercial by Patrick Buchanan.

The only trouble with the authors' account is that it's not true. The President made plain in his speech that he was offering his package in two parts, the first a crash program to jump-start the economy, and the rest to deal with longer-term issues. Since the personal exemption increase was not to take effect for some time, it wasn't included in the short-term package. It is true that the President said the exemption increase

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was something "we can do right away," but no White House reporter should have been thrown off: Sam Skinner and Darman described the two phases to reporters in detail two hours before the President spoke. The White House even passed out a fact sheet that made it clear that the package was being offered in two phases. It may be fair to accuse Bush of not being serious about the second phase, since Congress rarely acts on more than one such package in a single year, but it's simply inaccurate to report that he "abandoned" it.

**D**uffy and Goodgame's account of the President's signing of the 1991 Civil Rights Bill is similarly flawed. They repeat the charges of his political enemies that he demagogued that issue by claiming it was a "quota bill," and that he caved in and signed it only when his position was compared to that of David Duke. They could hardly have missed the point more completely. Bush is what is sometimes called "goo-goo" on civil rights—a Dudley Dooright who wants to be loved, especially by old-line civil rights leaders such as Benjamin Hooks. (When the L.A. riots erupted, the first thing the White House did was to summon not such conservative black activists as Robert Woodson and Detroit city councilman Keith Butler but such liberals as Joseph Lowery, Coretta King, and Hooks. Only when some of them couldn't come were Woodson and others asked to attend.)

The civil rights battle began with the 1989 Supreme Court decision in *Wards Cove v. Atonio*, which overturned a line of case law that had placed most of the burden of proof in employment civil rights cases on the employer. Hooks and other activists wanted legislation to reverse *Wards Cove*. The Justice Department recommended at first that the administration do nothing. The President, however, decided he wanted a bill and the administration eventually proposed one. As the civil rights community wanted, it placed the burden of proof back on the employer in cases of a disparity between the racial makeup of a particular business and that of the overall work force, allowing suits to be brought based on statistical imbalance. It would be up to the employer to justify its hiring practices in light of any "disparate impact" on a minority. This raised the

prospect of quotas, since the only sure way to avoid being sued would be to hire enough minority employees to assure that there were no racial imbalance compared to the community.

Still, the administration believed that a bill could be drawn that would undo *Wards Cove* without *de facto* quotas. Democrats in Congress, in the belief that the President would not dare veto any civil rights bill, considerably tightened the language to the point where the Justice Department and White House counsel Boyden Gray regarded it as a patent quota bill, and urged the President to veto it. He did—but with little hope that his quota argument would outweigh the popular consensus favoring civil rights legislation. To the surprise of the President and his aides, though, national public opinion was strongly behind them. Conservatives were delighted and thought the fight was over. But they misunderstood the President, who still wanted a bill and eventually got one that passed muster with White House lawyers. He signed it.

Patrick Buchanan has since said that the bill was the final straw for him, con-

vincing him to run against Bush. It was a bitter battle that left all sides deeply distrustful of one another's motives. Argument rages still about whether the bill is better or worse than the President could have gotten all along. The White House feels the President's own bill is proof of his good intentions. Some civil rights lawyers think that, once the fight broke out, the Democrats should have accepted the original Bush bill. You will find none of this reported in this book. Instead, there's the bald charge that Bush signed the bill to avoid resembling David Duke, which fits in with a favorite Duffy-Goodgame theme: that Bush is given to "thinly veiled race-baiting." Aside from a few passing references to Willie Horton, there's not so much as an anonymous quote to support the charge.

*Marching in Place* seems to be a job done in haste. There is far too little original reporting and far too much reliance on secondary sources, even when those sources got things wrong. The explanation may be that Duffy and Goodgame haven't been known for spending a lot of time around the White House. Too busy writing this book, no doubt. □

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ELEANOR ROOSEVELT:  
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reviewed by KENNETH S. LYNN

**S**harp-witted Frances Perkins, who got to know Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt more than twenty years before becoming FDR's Secretary of Labor, said of Eleanor that

one of the great quarrels she had with her lot is that Franklin didn't listen to her. . . . That's her gripe. I shouldn't say that, but it's true. He never did rely on her. He liked her as a reporter . . . [but] when most men would have asked their wives what they thought, he didn't.

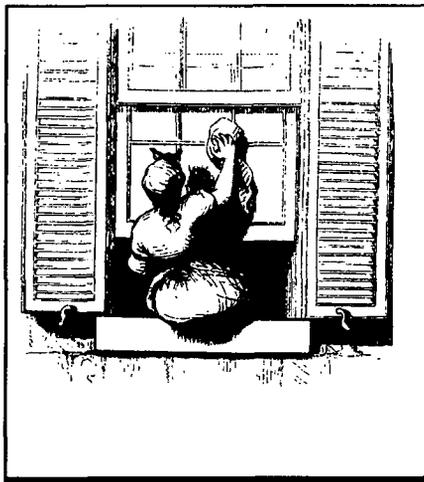
That estimate helps confirm the judgment that historian Geoffrey Ward offers us in the best of all the Roosevelt books, *A First-Class Temperament* (1989): that Eleanor was too little like her charming and breezily duplicitous husband, too humorless, too admonitory, too easily aggrieved, too unwilling to relax, for him to savor her company. Blanche Weisen Cook, however, has chosen not to recall Secretary Perkins's words in her new biography of Mrs. Roosevelt. Instead, she contends—without any citations, alas, of supporting evidence—that “[Eleanor] felt that [Franklin] admired her intelligence and relied on her advice.”

As her book makes clear time and again, the key to the mind of Cook—a professor of history and women's studies at John Jay College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and currently the vice president for research of the American Historical Association—is that she is much less interested in assembling reliable biographical testimony than in propagating feminist heroine-worship. That she is proud of being an ideological warrior

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rather than a disinterested scholar is indicated in her preface and acknowledgments, where she characterizes herself as “embattled,” extends thanks for their helpfulness to such symbolical figures as Alger Hiss and “the women of the Gay Women's Alternative,” and finishes off with a salute to the members of her own “family”—only one of whom bears a name that resembles her own—for having rallied round her “when there are so many other battles to wage, so many waves to ride, so much else to do.”

Cook's celebration of Mrs. Roosevelt as one of the “foremothers” of feminists like herself also encompasses disparagements of men in general and of FDR in particular. At times her sexist prejudices emerge indirectly, via references to the opinions—the alleged opinions, that is,



for substantiating footnotes are notably absent—of various women in the story. Thus we are told that Mrs. Roosevelt was “convinced that . . . men enter politics to pursue their own careers [whereas] women are motivated by a desire to change society, to improve the daily conditions of life.” More often than not, though, the anti-male animus in the book

unmistakably derives from the author. The well-known comment, for instance, of Franklin and Eleanor's daughter, Anna, that her mother regarded sex as “an ordeal to be borne” prompts the defensive-aggressive Cook to exclaim, quite gratuitously, that “such a remark raises the question of FDR as a lazy and selfish lover.” Her other put-downs of Franklin attack him from so many directions that she finally seems to be arguing that he could not have got any further in politics than the state Senate in Albany had he not married Eleanor. For it was his “profoundly political wife,” says Cook, who fed him “insights about his colleagues” in Albany, who was “largely responsible” for smoothing his path to better relations with Tammany reformers like Al Smith and Robert Wagner, who “built bridges, even over the most treacherous terrain,” who made “what might have seemed impossible alliances.”

**T**he best part of *Eleanor Roosevelt* is its delineation of its heroine's childhood. That those years were a desperate time for her; that intimacy with her cold and standoffish mother was never possible; that her mercurial, distracted, drunken father—whom she adored—was subject to fits of hysteria and madness; that she was orphaned before she was ten; that she suffered for years at the hands of a nurse who pulled her hair and cut large holes in her socks; that she was all but suffocated by her screwed-up maternal grandmother who spent many hours alone in a darkened bedroom with the windows closed and the shades drawn and who made little Eleanor wear hideously unattractive black stockings and high-ankled shoes, are facts that for the most part have been made familiar to us by other biographers, but Cook deserves credit for an exceptionally vivid account of them. Implicit, however, in her chronicle of victimization are questions about long-term emotional dismemberment that as a feminist hagiographer she cannot bear to deal with. For the defiant proposition on which *Eleanor Roosevelt* builds is that “E.R. lived a life dedicated to passion and experience.”

A single footnote in Geoffrey Ward's *A First-Class Temperament* does more to aid our understanding of Mrs. Roosevelt's warped and stunted inner life than do Cook's five hundred pages: