

As Legacies Go:

There's been a lot of talk about the President, in his last year in office, paying attention to his legacy. You know, the image for posterity that an outgoing president cultivates so that he is remembered favorably, regardless of his performance in office. Take, for instance, the Africa trip and the renewed interest in peace for Palestine and Israel. Every president does it. This is standard behavior. These are powerful men who are used to having things the way they want them. These are men who employ talented people to do the spinning and framing and patching up on a run down property. They apply the spackle and a fresh coat of paint, if you will.

Reagan did it. Clinton did it. My goodness even U.S. Grant, a truly lousy president, did it. At least he had to write his own stuff. So this is nothing new. It goes along with the notion of a Presidential Library, although for this president it may have to be the Presidential Bookmobile. These are shrines established to keep alive the positive image of former presidents. Everyone has one. If nothing else they are great places to keep mounds and mounds of printed and recorded matter. Powerful men think that everything they say and do should be preserved for future generations. Their enormous egos are the main ingredient of their success in the first place so it goes with the territory that a president should have a somewhat inflated view of his own utterances and deeds.

It just so happens that, every once in a while, some really interesting stuff gets misplaced as happened with several minutes of the Watergate Tapes. But that's a different story. We're talking about the image that this President really wants to leave behind. We're talking about the approved for public perusal stuff. We're talking about how a man wants history to view him going forward for generations.

So, imagine if you will, stepping into the Presidential Bookmobile, and encountering the impressive bronze plaque that outlines the President's achievements while inviting you inside to explore further the details of his two terms. It might go something like this.

George W. Bush. Forty-third President of the United States. 2001-2009

He was as ordinary as the doily on Grandma's chair. No special talents, no scary skills.

He won his first term by getting fewer votes than the other guy.

He avenged the 911 attacks by beating up another nobody who had nothing to do with them.

He increased the national debt astronomically and the only people with anything to show for it were the war profiteers and his friends who ran hedge funds. The rest of the country entered a recession.

He made sure that there was no national health care, just bottom line medicine. Health care if you have the money for it.

He established, for the first time in our history that torture, degradation and jailhouse murder were legal, above board and approved.

He oversaw the absolutely pointless killing of thousands of Americans and tens of thousands of nameless souls who had the misfortune of being Iraqis. He named it righteous.

He coerced the phone companies and internet providers into spy on you, just in case you were planning on attacking the Panama Canal.

He saw to it that the American image abroad changed from benefactor to bully, from caring to cutthroat. America became as roundly hated and ridiculed as the British were at the peak of their empire, for exactly the same reasons.

He chopped down, undercut and undid any bit of environmental protection if it posed any threat at all to the soaring profits of the drillers and dumpers.

He made every effort to have science be the slave of belief and research the tool of politics. It wasn't easy to be against intelligent discussion until he made it a popular pastime.

He made the wincing, greedy stance of the old boys' boardroom the model for national ideals. If it makes money it's good. If it's loyal it gets promoted. If it wins, even at the cost of honor, it has a place at the table.

That's an impressive list to start your tour of the Bookmobile. But as legacies go, it stinks.