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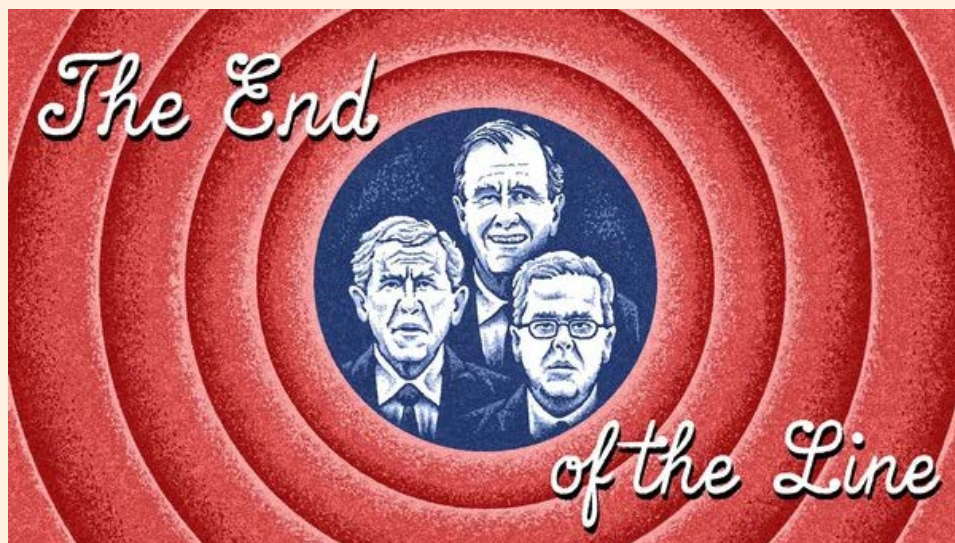
Read my lips: the Bush era is over



Edward Luce

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No matter how hard Jeb tries he cannot distance himself from the name and legacy



Read my lips: The Bush era is over.

Jeb'll fix it" is the latest mantra of [Jeb Bush's flailing campaign](#). Whatever problem America faces, Florida's former governor has the nous to solve it. Alas, Jeb's reinvention as a regular Joe with a toilet plunger is unlikely to fix his own campaign. Just one in 25 Republican voters [now support him](#). Big donors are [looking elsewhere](#). At some point, there will be autopsies. Proximate causes will leap out (his awkwardness on the stump would rank highly). Yet it is increasingly clear that his campaign was doomed before it began. No matter how hard Jeb tries to distance himself from the Bush name, it cannot match how far he needs to go.

Jeb's quandary has been brought into sharp relief by Jon Meacham's biography of his father, George Herbert Walker Bush. *Destiny and Power* is a fitting title for a patrician who took America's reins just as it was sealing its cold war victory. Ask almost any student of diplomacy — American or foreign — and they agree that Bush 41's presidency is underrated. The Soviet collapse could have turned nasty. Bush senior guided a peaceful lifting of the Iron Curtain and spurned the unanimous advice of aides to appear on the Berlin Wall as it was collapsing. He did not want to dance on the grave of Russia's empire. Nor did he wish to hijack Germany's moment.

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By today's standards, Bush senior's restraint would qualify as electoral malpractice. Yet it showed the quiet confidence of a superpower that knew history was on its side. Europeans remain grateful for Bush senior's handling of the end of the cold war. Most Republicans, on the other hand, recall him with disdain. He is famous for saying "read my lips: no new taxes". Among conservatives he is notorious for having broken that pledge in 1991 when he pushed a budget that raised taxes to reduce the US deficit. It was a statesmanlike act that proved electorally costly. It also sowed the seeds for the anti-establishment Republican backlash that is now engulfing his son.

In politics, it is not what you say but what people hear. Branding his campaign "Jeb!" has not fooled anybody. What they read instead is "Bush?!"

Jeb's bumper sticker was hollow. It implied that he had thought through which parts of his family legacy he would repudiate. Yet, even now, it seems he has little idea. Last summer Jeb took [five attempts](#) to answer the basic question of whether he would have emulated his brother's 2003 invasion of Iraq. It was clear that he had not thought it through. At first he said yes: George W Bush had been correct in invading Iraq. Then he switched to yes, probably, but he would have focused on better handling the invasion's aftermath. Then he decided he did not like answering hypotheticals. Finally, he came up with the formula that if he had known then what we know now — that the invasion would unleash chaos and hand Iraq to

Iran on a platter — he would not have gone to war. Voters had stopped listening by then. What they heard was his brother's legacy messing with his head.

Even now, Jeb cannot handle a Bush question [without stumbling](#). Passages from the Meacham biography in which Bush 41 puts the blame for what went wrong with Bush 43's presidency on his "iron ass" vice-president, Dick Cheney, and the "arrogant" secretary of defence, Donald Rumsfeld, have dragged Jeb once more on to awkward dynastic terrain. The timing could hardly be worse. The book is officially launched on Tuesday, which is when the Republicans will stage their fourth presidential debate. Jeb has done badly in the first three. In one, he insisted his brother "kept America safe" after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. This was in response to criticisms from Donald Trump, of all people, who said the Iraq invasion was a disaster. When Mr Trump is attacking your family for being too bellicose, you know you are in trouble.

“ When Trump is attacking your family for being too bellicose, you know you are in trouble ”

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It is theoretically possible that Jeb will pull off an improbable comeback. Money will carry him some distance. But the big dollars are starting to switch to Marco Rubio, Jeb's former protégé, and Ted Cruz, the Texan hardliner. Mr Rubio, 44, has differentiated himself by running a forward-looking campaign that argues that the US needs a new generation of leaders to handle its 21st-century challenges. The

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young senator's future tense has been widely contrasted with the rest of the Republican field, which looks back to "make America great again" (Mr Trump), to "revive America" (Ben Carson), to "reignite America" (Mr Cruz) and so on.

In fact, Mr Rubio is not alone. Jeb Bush, too, has crafted a future tense message that promises the "right to rise" and that pays as much heed as Mr Rubio to America's middle-class crisis. Few have noticed. Jeb promises 4 per cent growth "as far as the eye can see", to treat the US as an "emerging nation", and a new openness to immigration — "we come in 34 different flavours", he said. The case he makes for Bush 45 is about the future. But voters keep seeing the past. Even if Jeb were a skillful campaigner, he has arrived too late at the family party. Perhaps he should have listened to his mother. "There are other people out there who are very qualified," said Barbara Bush two years ago when asked if Jeb should run. "We've had enough Bushes."

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RBater 14 minutes ago

41 always appeared to be in touch with America and the world and so may feel that there have been enough Bush's in the White House. Perhaps the publication of the autobiography is timed to help scupper the chances of Jeb, so leaving the field clear for others.

I wonder what 41 thinks of 43's presidency when considering what 41 said in his "World Transformed" published two years before Dubya was in the White House? "To occupy Iraq would instantly shatter our coalition, turning the whole Arab world against us. [It would start] an urban guerrilla war and plunge that part of the world into even greater instability".

He must have been devastated when he watched the antics of W, Cheney and Rumsfeld once they got their hands on the levers of power.

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Vee_Kay 30 minutes ago

Kennedy line - over.

Bush line - over

Clinton line - can't end soon enough!

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AndyLit 59 minutes ago

Jeb's failure is testament to the GOP base. Nothing more, nothing less.

In decades past the big money determined the GOP nominee. While the money will still play a major role, the 1st choice of that money has been rejected by the base. The next choice of the money will almost certainly be Rubio. Who has a very rocky path to the nomination.

No what matter the pundits and the media may say, the #1 issue for the base is amnesty. The establishment GOP have even now failed to grasp what the base has understood for more than a decade. Amnesty, in any form, will result in an eventual permanent Democrat majority.

I wish I knew what was in the minds of people like Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush. How is it that they fail to see the inevitable death of the GOP if the electorate is diluted with millions of "immigrants"? Are they so ego-maniacal that they think they can sway this new wave to the right? Or are they so greedy and shortsighted that they place their own personal success over the success of the party, and the security of the nation?

The GOP base has spoken in the polls and will do so again during the primaries. The only possible path for an establishment nominee is through a brokered convention. And then only through the use of establishment "bonus" and super-delegates. The majority popular vote of the GOP electorate will be shared among Trump, Cruz and Carson. Rubio will favored by less than 20% of the popular vote.

If the convention produces an establishment candidate like Rubio, it will be the end of the GOP as a viable national party, at least at the POTUS level. The base MIGHT turn out for the sole purpose of defeating Hillary in November, but they will do so grudgingly, and will never again support the GOP at the national level.

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Denver 48 minutes ago

@AndyLit Jeb's failure is a testament to how stupid he was to press onward with a political dynasty in a Republic. Let us all hope that the democrat base will be as wise and reject Hillary for the same reasons..

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AndyLit 34 minutes ago

@Denver

Wishful thinking on your part. Bush was not alone in his stupidity. He raised huge amounts of money for his campaign and attracted even larger amount to SuperPacs.

The GOP power brokers were certain that money would be the primary factor.

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Denver just now

@AndyLit @Denver power prestige vote buying crony capitalism rent seeking. Both "parties" are just as guilty.

Re-elect no one.

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ForgottenHistory 1 hour ago

Here's the problem: IF Jeb would be elected, or almost elected as with his brother against Al Gore, which family-member can Jeb use to seal the victory he's-not-entitled-to ??

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Kevin Alexanderman 2 hours ago

The other Bush's were facilitors of a military dictatorship.

Hopefully, the American knives in the drawer are finally getting sharper.

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nb 2 hours ago

"They underestimated me."— George W. Bush, Nov. 6, 2000

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ForgottenHistory 1 hour ago

@nb was that after or before Jeb bribed him the victory by declaring black votes void [in Florida were he was governor at the time, check 9/11 fahrenheit movie]?

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Salem Engineer 2 hours ago

No offense to the Third World but political dynasties do not belong in an advanced country.

And, I think most of us would agree, George Bush senior was quite enough thank you!

I wasn't all that impressed by George senior at the time but compared to GW and Jeb, the guy belongs on Mt. Rushmore.

George Senior (and Collin Powell) had the good sense to realize that creating a power vacuum in Iraq, by deposing Saddam, would lead to chaos.

Clueless GW and his puppet master Cheney didn't; and the world will be paying the price for decades to come. Between 9/11, Iraq, and the Great Recession, GW's two terms have to be the worst presidency, really, in US history.

And Jeb! says that he would have invaded Iraq too, even knowing what we know now. One can only hope the age of the Bushes is over.

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/B 2 hours ago

@Salem Engineer is that why Powell gave that big testimony on anthrax? He's a liar. Totally agree on political dynasty all but nailing on sub-standard candidates. On both sides.

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Salem Engineer 2 hours ago

@/B @Salem Engineer

Yeah, I was disappointed by Powell's role in GW's administration.

They basically used him as a stooge because he was, really, the only person in the administration that had *any* credibility. He should have resigned... History would have remembered him better if he had.

He did keep us from deposing Saddam in the first Gulf War... Remember his "Pottery Barn" rule on Iraq... "You break it, you own it."

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/B 2 hours ago

@Salem Engineer but he didn't resign because he's an utterly horrible person. Let's hope history remembers him as a dreadful power grabber who put his gain above human life.

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RiskAdjustedReturn 12 minutes ago

@Salem Engineer

"Between 9/11, Iraq, and the Great Recession, GW's two terms have to be the worst presidency, really, in US history."

Well, 9/11 was Clinton's baby. They first bombed the WTC in 1993, and then spent 8 years planning 9/11 while Clinton was president.

The great recession was really just an aftereffect of Clinton's equity bubble. When it crashed (during Clinton's term), the Fed flooded us with liquidity and launched the housing bubble.

Clinton also repealed the Glass-Steagall Act, adding to the problem.

I'll grant you that Bush mishandled Iraq.

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/B 3 hours ago

It's not over so long as all these fools keep popping up because of their dads/granddads. Bush Jr was thick - he should have been flipping burgers. This guy is useless. Maybe a regular office job.

What America needs is a meritocracy brought about by inheritance tax. Let's have that competition they bang on about so much, starting with their own off-spring having the same chance as some kid from the poor part of town.

Let's have Chelsea Clinton working hard or she's gonna fail. Let's have Rand Paul sweating it. Let's have Trump working his way up instead of taking daddy's cash pile.

American politics looks like a total mess.

Big deal - Jeb is out so we get a relative of a president (even if she did have a career before it still stinks) vs Trump. People should see this as a huge problem not some sign of real democracy. It's one phoney out, one phoney in.

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Paul A. Myers 3 hours ago

A nice recounting of Bush Senior's wise and effective ending of the Cold War, a real professional's professional achievement. But the Republican base had hated kissinger-like foreign policy ever since Nixon's accommodation with Russia via strategic arms limitations agreements (SALT) and the opening to China. They were comfortable with Reagan's often bellicose rhetoric even if the "prags" around him kept him from "being Reagan" (part of the the explanatory gospel in the Reaganite theology). So the world hailed Bush Senior's statesmanship while the Republican base sulked while looking for another bogeyman.

The Meacham biography is undoubtedly the seal on a collapse that has long been underway. The criticisms of Rumsfeld and Cheney indirectly but loudly shout that George W. Bush was inadequate as a leader and president--an assessment shared by many Americans and one that is baking into the historical judgment of the largest simultaneous domestic and international failure in modern American history (this is a glacier that is unlikely to melt anytime soon). George W. Bush would of course be compelled to defend his management of his two subordinates--and once again buy into all of the mistakes of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Luce makes the telling point that Marco Rubio has put his campaign into the future tense to put distance between his undoubtedly new leadership (he's 44) and this failed legacy (unfortunately Rubio's relationship with the Miami car dealer--a leading neocon--and the Paul Singer endorsement--another leading neocon--mean that the black creature from the Middle East lagoon will again crawl out and slime Rubio).

Jeb Bush's insurmountable political and policy problem is that he lives in Bush World, a bubble

defined by interconnected sets of ill-thought out thinking on foreign and economic policy. This bubble is a hard shell and new thinking does not permeate it. Besides foreign policy thinking dominated by the Committee for the Present Danger, the economic policy is hopelessly Utopian and Pollyannish. Anyone who looked under the hood of Bush's four percent economic growth assertion quickly understood that this was ill-thought out quackery and supply side economics. Jeb Bush is basically a policy Dweeb trying to sound like an adult.

The existential question of this campaign is not the collapse and withdrawal of Jeb Bush. Rather it is just what will the Republican party be in 2016 presidential politics and who will be its public face.

Michael Lind in Politico argues that half century of movement conservatism is cracking up in 2016 as the three wings of the Republican party each advance deeply unpopular policies over which these wings have a hammerlock. Foreign policy is in the grip of neocons; domestic policy wants to roll back Social Security and in particular health care programs; cultural policy is hostile to abortion, marriage rights, and relative libertarianism with its hardline morality. There's something on the agenda for everyone to dislike--intensely.

In a way this year is not about the end of the Bushes, but rather the end of the Reagan Legacy controlling Republican politics from the grave.

<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/11/days-of-desperation-213329>

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Chesterbrook1 1 hour ago

@Paul A. Myers Thoughtful comment. Thanks for the reference to the Politico article - Lind's insight with respect to those three deeply unpopular, and largely orthogonal, schools in the Republican party is one worth exploring.

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domino 4 hours ago

That George H Bush has published his autobiography claiming that his son George W Bush was badly advised by Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney may be enough to sink any more Bush family members in the Oval Office.

Napoleon stated he did not want any brilliant Generals; just lucky ones. So we can see that the Bush legacy is now a broken chalice as recorded in this review.

In fact to a large extent the same rule applies to the Clinton family that seems too clean and simple; only a sure thing for loyal financial supporters. Whoever wins next year the pressure will be intense; 1972 when the Republicans panicked and claimed that George McGovern was a closet socialist; a claim that made him look like a cat on a hot tin roof. Watergate followed and made television history where we saw Hillary the first time in Washington as an attorney.

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Chesterbrook1 1 hour ago

@domino Not sure that it is an autobiography. If it is, it will make for some interesting conversation at the Bush Thanksgiving family dinner.

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