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George W. Bush

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Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** Early Life and Family Roots
- **Chapter 2** Childhood in Midland and Houston
- **Chapter 3** Education at Andover and Yale
- **Chapter 4** Service in the Texas Air National Guard
- **Chapter 5** Harvard Business School and Business Ventures
- **Chapter 6** Arbusto Energy and the Oil Industry
- **Chapter 7** Involvement with the Texas Rangers
- **Chapter 8** Early Political Involvement and Lessons Learned
- **Chapter 9** The 1994 Texas Gubernatorial Campaign
- **Chapter 10** Governor of Texas: Setting the Stage
- **Chapter 11** Education Reform in Texas
- **Chapter 12** Faith-Based Initiatives and Social Policy
- **Chapter 13** Tort Reform and Criminal Justice
- **Chapter 14** Environmental Policy and the Texas Power Sector
- **Chapter 15** Building a National Profile
- **Chapter 16** The 2000 Presidential Campaign
- **Chapter 17** The Contested Election and Supreme Court Decision
- **Chapter 18** Early Presidential Domestic Agenda
- **Chapter 19** September 11, 2001: A Nation Changed
- **Chapter 20** The War on Terror: Afghanistan and Beyond
- **Chapter 21** The Iraq War: Decisions and Consequences
- **Chapter 22** The Economy and Medicare Reform
- **Chapter 23** Re-Election and the Challenges of a Second Term
- **Chapter 24** Hurricane Katrina and Domestic Criticism
- **Chapter 25** The 2008 Financial Crisis and Bush's Legacy

Introduction

George W. Bush, the 43rd President of the United States, stands among the most consequential leaders of the early 21st century. His presidency spanned a period defined by extraordinary upheaval, including the seismic events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent launch of the War on Terror. Yet, the legacy of George W. Bush cannot be understood solely through the lens of his years in the White House. To appreciate the complexities of his leadership, it is essential to examine the man behind the office—his upbringing, career, worldview, and the influences that shaped his decisions.

Born into an American political dynasty, George W. Bush grew up in the shadow of his father, George H.W. Bush, himself a future president. The values, ambitions, and connections of the Bush family afforded him unique opportunities, but they also brought high expectations and public scrutiny. Throughout his youth in Texas and his education at esteemed institutions like Phillips Academy and Yale University, Bush developed a strong sense of identity rooted in family, faith, and a belief in public service.

Bush's early adulthood was marked by a diverse set of experiences: military service during the Vietnam War era, Harvard Business School, and a career spanning the oil industry and professional sports management. These ventures were often met with challenges and setbacks, yet they equipped him with a pragmatic understanding of leadership, risk, and resilience. Equally influential was his personal journey—his deepening Christian faith and decision to marry Laura Welch, a partnership that provided both stability and support as his life entered the public arena.

His initial forays into politics were met with mixed results, notably an unsuccessful congressional bid in 1978. However, his time as Governor of Texas brought successes that would set the groundwork for his future presidential ambitions. As governor, Bush earned a reputation as a bipartisan collaborator and education reformer, while also appealing to conservative values. The reforms and initiatives of his governorship—many contentious, many transformative—brought him to national prominence and made him a viable contender for the presidency.

The 2000 presidential campaign, one of the most bitterly contested in American history, propelled George W. Bush to the nation's highest office by the slimmest of electoral margins. The decisions he made as president—from education reform and tax policy to the defining moments of 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—would profoundly shape the country and the international order. Critics and supporters alike have spent years debating the wisdom, morality, and effectiveness of

his policies both at home and abroad.

Since leaving office, Bush has taken on the role of elder statesman and philanthropist, choosing to stay largely above the fray of political partisanship. This biography seeks to trace the arc of his life and career, exploring not just the key milestones and controversies but also the personal convictions and challenges that guided his leadership. Through chronicling the triumphs and trials of George W. Bush—from childhood to post-presidency—this book aims to offer a balanced portrait of a man whose impact on America endures.

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CHAPTER ONE: Early Life and Family Roots

George Walker Bush entered the world on July 6, 1946, in New Haven, Connecticut, a city steeped in academic tradition and historic New England character. His birth came just shy of a year after the end of the Second World War, a time of immense change and optimism in the United States, as soldiers returned home and the nation began to pivot towards a new era of prosperity and global influence.

He was the firstborn child of George Herbert Walker Bush and Barbara Pierce Bush. His parents, both from prominent East Coast families, represented a fusion of established wealth, social standing, and a strong undercurrent of civic duty that had long defined their respective lineages. This blending of backgrounds would provide the foundational environment for young George W.'s formative years.

His father, George H.W. Bush, hailed from a family with deep roots in finance and politics. George H.W.'s father, Prescott Bush, had already carved out a distinguished career on Wall Street and would later serve as a United States Senator representing Connecticut for a decade, beginning in 1952. This established political presence meant that the Bush name already carried weight in national circles even before George W. was born.

The senior Bush's family background was intertwined with the world of banking and investment. Prescott Bush was a partner at Brown Brothers Harriman & Co., a venerable investment bank. The family also had a connection to the powerful Walker family through Prescott's wife, Dorothy Walker Bush, George H.W.'s mother. This lineage included George Herbert Walker, her father, a wealthy banker and businessman who founded the Walker Cup golf tournament.

On his mother's side, Barbara Pierce also came from a family of considerable achievement and influence, though perhaps in a different sphere than finance and politics. Her father, Marvin Pierce, was the publisher of McCall Corporation magazines, including the popular *McCall's* and *Redbook*. This provided a solid, upper-middle-class upbringing for Barbara in Rye, New York.

The courtship of George H.W. Bush and Barbara Pierce began at a Christmas dance when she was just sixteen. Their connection was immediate, leading to an engagement before George H.W. went off to serve as a naval aviator during World War II. Their marriage in January 1945, while the war still raged, solidified the union of these two notable families.

After the war, George H.W. enrolled at Yale University, taking advantage of the G.I.

Bill. This period in New Haven saw the birth of their first child, George Walker Bush. Life for the young family at Yale was somewhat constrained by the typical student budget, a contrast to the more privileged backgrounds from which both parents came. They lived in modest housing, part of the influx of returning veterans starting families and pursuing higher education.

The choice of "George Walker" for their son's name was a clear nod to both sides of the family, honoring his father and his maternal great-grandfather, George Herbert Walker. It linked him directly to the family's history and expectations, a weight that would follow him throughout his life. The name itself was a symbol of the lineage into which he was born.

The early months of George W.'s life were spent in the relative quietude of New Haven while his father completed his studies at Yale. George H.W. excelled academically and was involved in various campus activities, including captaining the baseball team and joining the Skull and Bones society, following in the footsteps of his own father.

This period, though brief, placed young George W. within a specific cultural and social context – that of the East Coast establishment, characterized by elite universities, family connections, and a certain unspoken code of conduct and expectation. It was a world of privilege, but also one that demanded a sense of responsibility and contribution.

However, the East Coast was not destined to be young George W.'s home for long. George H.W. Bush harbored ambitions beyond following his father directly into finance or politics in Connecticut. The post-war economic boom was creating new opportunities, particularly in the burgeoning oil industry in the American West and Southwest.

Texas, in particular, was experiencing rapid growth fueled by its vast oil reserves. It represented a frontier of sorts, a place where a young man could potentially make his own fortune, independent of established family networks, though certainly leveraging the skills and connections his background provided.

In 1948, when George W. was just two years old, the Bush family made a pivotal move. They packed up their belongings and headed southwest to the dusty, oil-rich town of Midland, Texas. This decision marked a significant departure from the traditional path of the Bush family and would profoundly shape George W.'s identity.

Moving to Midland was a conscious choice by George H.W. to strike out on his own. It was an opportunity to build a career from the ground up in a dynamic, less formal environment than the boardrooms of New York or the political corridors of Washington D.C. It was a place defined by hard work, risk-taking, and a more direct, less layered social structure.

For young George W., this meant that his earliest and most impressionable years would be spent not among the leafy streets and historical architecture of New England, but under the vast, open skies of West Texas. Midland, at the time, was a boomtown, attracting ambitious individuals eager to capitalize on the oil reserves discovered beneath the Permian Basin.

Life in Midland was different. It was hot, dusty, and centered around the rhythms of the oil fields. Neighbors were often recent arrivals themselves, focused on building lives and careers. The social scene was less about old money and established institutions and more about community gatherings centered around schools, churches, and local businesses.

This move exposed George W. to a different strain of American culture – one more individualistic, more rugged, and perhaps more overtly patriotic than the more reserved sensibilities of the East Coast. It instilled in him a sense of Texas identity that would become a defining characteristic throughout his public life.

While his father worked to establish himself in the competitive oil business, George W. experienced a childhood that, while still privileged compared to many, was less formal and more grounded in the realities of a growing, working community than his birth in Connecticut might suggest.

His parents, George H.W. and Barbara, adapted to their new surroundings. Barbara Bush quickly became involved in community activities, setting up their home and raising their growing family. The transition was not without its challenges, moving away from the familiar comforts and close family ties of the East Coast.

But Midland offered a sense of opportunity and a chance for the young Bush family to forge their own path. It was a place where George H.W. could test his mettle in a challenging industry, proving himself independently of his father's established success.

For George W., the move meant that the values and culture of Texas would become deeply embedded in his character. The straightforward manner, the emphasis on personal responsibility, and the strong sense of community prevalent in Midland would leave an indelible mark on his personality and worldview.

He would later often speak of his Texas roots, portraying himself as a product of the West Texas ethos – plainspoken, direct, and independent. This identity, forged in the plains of Midland, would become a significant part of his political persona in later years.

The presence of his grandfather, Prescott Bush, in national politics provided a distant

but constant reminder of the family's legacy of public service. Though physically separated by distance, the connection to the political world was part of the family fabric.

George W.'s early years were spent in a nurturing environment, surrounded by his parents and, eventually, his younger siblings as the Bush family grew. The move to Texas set the stage for a childhood that would be distinct from the experiences of his father and grandfather.

It was a childhood that combined elements of his family's East Coast background with the unique characteristics of West Texas. This blend of influences would contribute to the complex individual who would eventually rise to the highest office in the land.

The decision to move to Midland was a bold one for George H.W. and Barbara Bush. It represented a willingness to embrace the unknown and build a future away from the familiar. For young George W., it was the defining geographical shift of his early life, placing him squarely in the heart of Texas.

This move was more than just a change of address; it was a change of environment, culture, and perspective. It grounded the Bush family in a different part of the country, exposing them to new ways of life and new challenges.

As a young boy in Midland, George W. was part of a community shaped by the boom-and-bust cycles of the oil industry. He witnessed firsthand the entrepreneurial spirit and the risks associated with drilling for oil, experiences that would inform his understanding of business and economics.

The family's life in Midland was comfortable, but not ostentatious by the standards of the oil patch. They lived in modest homes, and George W. attended local schools, interacting with children from various backgrounds within the Midland community.

This period in Midland would instill in him a certain down-to-earth quality and a preference for straightforward communication, characteristics often associated with Texas culture. It provided a counterbalance to the more formal world of his East Coast relatives.

The foundations of his early life were thus a mix of East Coast tradition and Texas ruggedness. He was born into a family with a history of achievement and public service, but raised in an environment that valued independence and directness.

His parents, George H.W. and Barbara, provided a stable and loving home. They emphasized the importance of faith, family, and community, values that would remain central to George W. throughout his life.

The presence of younger siblings added another dynamic to the household. As the eldest, George W. experienced the typical responsibilities and challenges of being the big brother in a growing family.

The Bush family's time in Midland, though not the entirety of George W.'s childhood, was a crucial period that shaped his fundamental understanding of the world and his place in it. It was the backdrop against which his earliest memories were formed.

It was in Midland that he first experienced school, made childhood friends, and began to develop his own personality, distinct from that of his parents and siblings. The wide-open spaces of West Texas provided a different kind of playground than the more structured environments of the Northeast.

The move to Texas was, in many ways, an entrepreneurial venture for George H.W., and young George W. absorbed the lessons of risk, perseverance, and resilience that were inherent in the oil business. He saw the hard work involved in building a company and the uncertainties that came with drilling for oil.

This early exposure to the world of business, coupled with his family's history of public service, created a unique blend of influences that would shape his own ambitions. He was raised in an environment that valued both material success and contribution to the community and nation.

The Texas landscape itself played a subtle but significant role. The vastness of the sky, the heat, and the flat terrain were a constant presence, fostering a sense of scale and perhaps an appreciation for simplicity that would later manifest in his communication style.

While his connection to the East Coast remained through family visits and the presence of his grandfather in the Senate, his primary identity was being forged in Texas. He was a Bush, but increasingly, he was a Texas Bush.

The values he observed in Midland – neighborliness, self-reliance, and a strong sense of community – became deeply ingrained. These were not abstract concepts but lived realities in the close-knit environment of a growing Texas town.

His parents encouraged independence and a sense of adventure, qualities that were well-suited to the Texas environment. George W. was given room to explore and to develop his own interests.

The foundation of his faith was also laid during these early years, as the Bush family was active in their local church. Religion would become an increasingly important part of his life as he grew older.

The decision by George H.W. to move the family to Texas was a defining moment, not just for him but for his eldest son. It provided George W. with a different perspective on American life and instilled in him a strong regional identity.

This early exposure to Texas culture and the oil industry would prove invaluable later in life, both in his business career and his political pursuits in the state. He understood the people and the economy of Texas because he had grown up within them.

The early years in Midland were a period of growth and adaptation for the entire Bush family. They were building a new life in a new place, away from the immediate support network of their East Coast relatives, relying on each other and the nascent community around them.

George W.'s childhood in Midland was, in many ways, a quintessential American experience of the post-war boom era – a family moving to a place of opportunity, working hard, and putting down roots in a growing community.

This period laid the groundwork for the man he would become. The values instilled in him during his early years in Texas, combined with the legacy of his family's public service, created a unique foundation for his future endeavors.

He was a child of two worlds, the East Coast establishment and the Texas frontier. This duality would, in different ways, influence his approach to leadership and connect him to different segments of the American population.

The memories and experiences from these early years in Midland would remain vivid throughout his life, shaping his understanding of America and informing his interactions with its people.

His relationship with his father during these formative years was also crucial. George H.W.'s entrepreneurial drive and his later entry into Texas politics provided a direct example of public life and ambition.

Though specific childhood anecdotes belong in the next chapter, it is here, in the discussion of his birth and family roots, that the stage is set for understanding the environment that produced George W. Bush.

The blending of the Bush and Pierce families, with their histories of finance, publishing, and politics, provided a rich background. The move to Texas added a vital new dimension, grounding the family in a different reality.

This convergence of East Coast tradition and Texas dynamism created the unique context of George W. Bush's upbringing, setting him on a path that would eventually

lead him to the pinnacle of American power.

His birth in Connecticut linked him to the historical power centers of the nation, while his formative years in Texas connected him to the growing influence and distinctive culture of the South and Southwest.

These early years were the quiet prologue to a life that would later be lived on the world's stage, but the lessons learned and the identity forged in the relative obscurity of Midland would remain central to the man and his presidency.

He was born into a family with a clear trajectory of public service, yet his parents made a bold choice that gave their children a taste of a different kind of American life, one built on industry, community, and the vast potential of the American landscape.

The stage is now set for exploring his actual childhood experiences in Midland and later Houston, understanding how the seeds planted in these early years began to sprout and shape the future 43rd President of the United States.

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