

plexed by the public denial of evidence that Zionists forced a flood of Arabs from the land—"a pertinent question, especially for those of us concerned about 'forgetting.'" Unlike so many other prominent Americans who have been to Israel and simply marveled at the society, Stern has also visited the West Bank and is grieved by the occupation. Palestinian refugees "had been made to suffer for the crimes of omission and commission that the Europeans had committed against the Jews."

I wish he had brought these lessons home. The chief fault of this book is Stern's resistance to taking on the historian's "metaphysical fluency and ... arrogance" (intellectual qualities he praises in Hannah Arendt) when it comes to Jewish history in the United States. He does not apply to the American scene his knowledge of Bleichroder's presence at Bismarck's side or of the German nationalists' fury toward modernity. This reader kept waiting for Stern's opinion on such issues as: How powerful are Jews in America? How does their role in the economy and the professions compare to Weimar? The obvious question is of course whether our society is capable of seeking the extermination of Jews, but just as interesting is whether the Jewish role in the American establishment has hampered our ability to relate to the Arab world. As it is, the neoconservatives are only glimpsed here, for instance in a crack about how much money Richard Perle has made.

I found one lesson between the lines. In 1954 Stern is traveling on a boat back to Germany when he hears the news of the Supreme Court's landmark desegregation decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The reader exults with him: a great blot was removed from his adopted society, and Stern was able to bring out to Europe a demonstration of the noble American experiment. That was a very long time ago. ■

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[*Bully Boy: The Truth About Theodore Roosevelt's Legacy*, Jim Powell, Crown Forum, 336 pages]

Truth to Executive Power

By Thomas E. Woods Jr.

A FAIRLY RELIABLE rule of thumb when it comes to books on history and politics is that whatever *Publishers Weekly* advises you to do, spare no expense in doing the exact opposite.

An excellent case in point is Jim Powell's new book, *Bully Boy: The Truth About Theodore Roosevelt's Legacy*. Its author, *Publishers Weekly* informs us, "sees Roosevelt as a dangerous tyrant who sought to expand the power of the executive office in order to promote his own interests." Powell's book is "irresponsible revisionism at its worst."

Now you might think *Publishers Weekly*, in the Age of Bush, would be more inclined than usual to look with sympathy on a book that holds the executive branch, and those who contributed to its expansion, up to fresh scrutiny, but being a 21st-century liberal means attributing all government wickedness to the uniquely perverse George W. Bush. The possibility that the Source of All Iniquity may be building upon precedents set by his predecessors, including those who our intellectual class has told us belong to the ranks of our "great presidents," is to be rejected with a kind of indignant horror.

Powell's study of TR is truly withering. It's one thing to argue that taxes are too high, that eminent domain has been abused, or that maybe Bill Clinton shouldn't have bombed that pharmaceutical plant in Sudan. What's so "irresponsible" about Powell's book is that it goes well beyond obvious cases like these and looks critically even at those government initiatives that everyone knows are indispensable and wonderful and that are taught to schoolchildren as evidence of the marvels of democracy.

Responsible people stick to the script: the state protects you, the state fosters prosperity, the state pursues justice, and without the state every one of you would revert instantly to barbarism. The cartoon version of TR's presidency that Powell seeks to overturn reinforces these civic myths, which is why our betters so often trot him out as a "great" or "near-great" president.

Thus the very accomplishments that the standard text cites on behalf of TR's greatness are what Powell uses to hang him. It hasn't exactly hurt TR's reputation that arguments on his behalf fit neatly into the space of a bumper sticker ("He made our food safe!" "He tamed big business!" "He protected the environment!"), while the inevitably more nuanced and accurate rendition of these historical episodes requires many pages of explanation. That, at last, is what Jim Powell has done in *Bully Boy*.

Decades before Powell's book there was Henry Pringle's unflattering study, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Biography*, but Pringle's analysis was uneven, and in any case his book is long out of print. Powell's book differs from Pringle's in that, rather than being merely an unfavorable biography, it is a self-conscious critique of Roosevelt and his legacy.

That critique is especially refreshing given the cross-ideological adulation that TR has enjoyed for a full century. The neoconservative Right loves him because in TR's rhetoric and leadership style they perceive the birth pangs of "national greatness conservatism," while the hopeless Left, which weeps over the Bush administration's lawlessness, can be counted on to cheer the lawlessness of TR because, well, his target was big business.

With certain New Left exceptions, moreover, the Left typically celebrates TR's contributions to the federal regulatory apparatus, quaintly taking the comic-book version of the story—why, these agencies were established by disinterested public-sector crusaders to protect the public from unscrupulous businessmen!—at face value. (Why the Left can be withering on the official

rationales given for American foreign policy but views domestic policy with an almost childlike confidence in paternal government is a good question.)

Bill Clinton once referred to Theodore Roosevelt as his favorite Republican president. And no wonder: TR's presidential activism, his frequent use of executive orders to effect policy, and his loathing of nonintervention make him appealing to present-day Democrats and Republicans alike. Clinton went so far as to award TR a posthumous Congressional Medal of Honor, a prize for which TR had unsuccessfully lobbied during his lifetime. ("I am entitled to the Medal of Honor and I want it," he wrote to a friend upon his return from the Spanish-American War.) It was thought at the time that since he had served in the war for a mere two weeks and his exploits had been confined to a single day, he came up short of the requirements for the medal.

Although his writing style can be rather bland, Powell is to be congratulated for carrying out a task that for many years has awaited a capable historian. Powell also acquits himself as a man of principle and courage: at a time when criticism of foreign intervention isn't especially welcome in some conservative and even libertarian circles—where this book is almost certainly being pitched—Powell refuses to shy away from the subject, criticizing both TR's interventionist philosophy as well as the interventions themselves. ("No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumphs of war," TR said, characteristically, in 1897.)

TR demanded American entry into World War I—as catastrophic a foreign-policy blunder as any American president has ever made—long before Woodrow Wilson made his fateful decision. He inserted into American political discourse the standard platitudes about world leadership: "A nation's first duty is within its own borders, but it is not thereby absolved from facing its duties in the world as a whole; and if it refuses to do so, it merely forfeits its right to struggle for a place among the peoples that shape the destiny of mankind." War, he believed, could be a positive good,

since it encouraged the manly and martial virtues over the flabbiness that besets a nation at peace. Yes, he really said things like that, repeatedly.

Nothing is left standing in the traditional story of TR once Powell completes his careful and relentless study. TR the great trustbuster becomes TR the knave whose arbitrary assaults on business made consumers undoubtedly worse off. TR the great regulator of the railroads becomes TR the destroyer of the railroads through ill-conceived regulation. (If TR really opposed monopoly he would have looked more kindly on the railroads, which undermined many a local monopoly by making products produced elsewhere locally available—and cut land transportation costs in half while doing so.)

To my knowledge, prior to Powell's work there was no systematic overview of TR's environmental policies from the point of view of a supporter of property rights and the market. TR has long been assumed to have had the moral high ground here, and his programs have carelessly been considered beyond reproach. Powell will have none of it.

For instance, Roosevelt lent federal support to reclamation work—irrigation projects and dam construction—in the West, which meant subsidies were being given to make it possible to farm arid land. These projects had the intended effect of encouraging the settlement of the West, though at the cost of an obviously inefficient use of labor and resources. "Large numbers of farmers poured their life savings into irrigation farming," Powell reports, "only to find that it made no sense. They went bankrupt." Even in the face of a dramatic increase in California's population, subsidized irrigation still consumes some 80 percent of the state's water.

The foolishness of these projects, which had bankrupted many a private firm that tried them and gave countless headaches to the states that did likewise, became even clearer in the decade that followed World War I. With agricultural production normalized in Western Europe, demand for American agricul-

tural products declined dramatically. American farmers began to complain of crop surpluses. Meanwhile, Roosevelt had used federal resources to encourage American farming in obviously unsuitable regions. For this we are expected to stand up and cheer?

One way to mollify Midwesterners angry that their tax dollars were going to subsidize the irrigation projects of their western competitors would be to subsidize something of theirs as well. That came in the form of subsidies to improve waterways—which, incidentally, were being used less and less since people typically preferred to use the railroads instead.

The legacy of TR's programs is very much with us today. The Bureau of Reclamation "has built more than six hundred dams around the United States, destroying beautiful valleys, building up salinity in irrigated soil, and drying up rivers. ... The bureau also wastes stupendous amounts of water by building reservoirs in hot, arid regions, where water standing out in the sun simply evaporates." Sierra Club president Adam Werbach told a House subcommittee in 1997 that Arizona's Lake Powell reservoir loses nearly 1 million acre-feet of water every year, enough "for a city the size of Los Angeles."

Powell carries the TR conservation story up to the present in other ways, recording little-known facts about the National Park Service's administration of the national parks and the federal government's unimpressive stewardship of the national forests compared to that of privately owned and managed forests.

Jim Powell's important book confirms that if the American people are ever to emerge from the propaganda fog that surrounds them, a first step must involve the merciless smashing of the icon of Teddy Roosevelt. Then it's on to the rest of the, ahem, great presidents. ■

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Payback Time



Writing of Imperial Germany in his fine book, *The Pity of War*, historian Niall Ferguson said “the combination of a relatively decentralized

federal system with a democratic national parliament made it more or less impossible for the Reich government to match the defense expenditure of its more centralized neighbors. ... German objectives, had Britain remained out, would not in fact have posed a direct threat to the Empire; the reduction of Russian power in Eastern Europe, the creation of a Central European Customs Union and acquisition of French colonies—there were all goals which were complementary to British interests.”

So much then for the British, French, and American propaganda of the time, which justified the millions of deaths with hysterical talk of German militarism, German imperialism, German quest for world domination, German bestiality. Millions of lives lost, millions maimed for no reason at all. And then one considers the other catastrophic consequences of that unnecessary war: economic depression in Europe, the Bolshevik revolution, Hitler, Stalin, World War II, the Holocaust. Here was a war that achieved no objective and from which no one derived any benefits except for Lenin, who otherwise would have ended his days in obscurity engaged in frenetic polemics with fellow exiles.

Selling a war is a serious business, and no one did it better than the Brits back then. Our present neocons are no slouches either, except they lack the British style of lying. They tend to need lots of makeup on TV because they sweat, and many of them are far too overweight. Never mind. So far only

hundreds of thousands have died in the war on Iraq (655,000 according to the Johns Hopkins study).

Like World War I, this was a war sold on a very big lie. The source of these lies, and thus the people responsible for this catastrophe, are easily identifiable. A small coterie of people ensconced themselves in the Pentagon and seized on the 9/11 terrorist attacks to foist a war on the United States, from which the American people would derive nothing but lost lives and mounting debts and whose only beneficiary was to be Israel.

This coterie set up a secretive group, the Office of Special Plans, whose aim was to frighten Americans into waging war on Iraq. It was overseen by Douglas Feith, then undersecretary of defense, and Feith’s researchers, David Wurmser and Michael Maloof, both protégés of the arch-neocon and war hawk Richard Perle. Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, liked what they showed him, in fact he “was bowled over.”

Knowing that genuine intelligence agencies like the CIA were bound to find out that Saddam had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, that he was a sworn enemy of al-Qaeda, and that he had ended his weapons of mass destruction programs more than ten years earlier, this little group set out to falsify the intelligence on the basis of which an unnecessary war could be sold to the American people. These conspirators—there is no better word to describe them—had longstanding ties to the Israeli military, the political

establishment, and particularly Benjamin Netanyahu.

In order for history not to repeat itself, some people have to be held responsible. The corruption in postwar Iraq is a major scandal in itself: \$800 million given to the Iraqi government in order to purchase weaponry has gone missing, and not a single person has been held to account. The fact that the Iraqi architect of the war against Saddam, Ahmad Chalabi, was a convicted mega-crook seems to have been forgotten by the administration. If the Democrats prevail in the House of Representatives, a congressional investigation has to be the first priority.

Kevin Tillman, the brother of slain Army Ranger and NFL star Pat Tillman, put it perfectly only last week. He too was an Army Ranger. “Somehow those afraid to fight an illegal invasion [Vietnam] decades ago are allowed to send soldiers to die for an illegal invasion they started.” Hear, hear! Every time I hear of a brave Marine losing his life or his limbs, I think of those smirking neocons on TV who managed to sell the war as if it were snake oil, and I’m compelled to demand justice. These conspirators are as responsible for the horrendous loss of life and the debt that will burden Americans for decades to come as Hitler’s madness was responsible for World War II, as Sir Edward Grey’s Germanophobia for World War I, as William Randolph Hearst’s yellow journalism for the Spanish-American War, as the Kennedy New Frontiersmen’s folly in toppling and assassinating South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem for the American debacle in Vietnam.

It’s payback time, with jail time for those who knowingly lied, and the sooner the better. ■