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Karl Rove Living In Denial?

by [Mark Skousen](#)
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"Bush is among the more conservative Presidents of the modern age."

--Karl Rove

In his bestselling memoir, *Courage and Consequence*, Karl Rove claims he is a Conservative with a capital "C."

His credentials include reading Milton Friedman and *National Review*, and campaigning for Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon. Prior to linking up with George W. Bush, he was a campaign consultant for Republicans. Most analysts consider him the political mastermind who twice elected George Bush to the presidency, and the architect of the Bush policies. He was Bush's chief political advisor and deputy chief of staff during the White House years.

In his important policy chapter, "Thinking Big," he defends Bush as a "bona fide conservative." He points to Bush's support for tax cuts, health savings accounts, school vouchers, private retirement accounts and Social Security privatization, free trade, his pro-life and pro-family stands, and, most importantly the war in Iraq, and keeping America safe. He insists that the idea that Bush was a "moderate" Republican is a "myth."

And no doubt these policies reflect the values of most conservatives.

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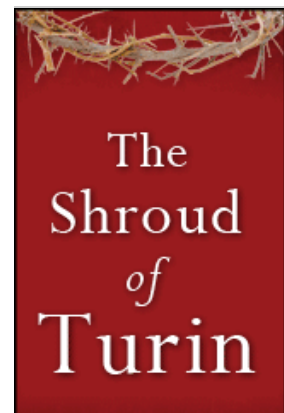
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But then Rove spends the rest of the chapter and most of the book living in denial. He calls "false" the claim that Bush didn't control government spending and allowed deficits to get out of hand. The deficits, he said, were due to recessions and the war in Iraq, and Bush actually "restrained" domestic federal spending.

Really? Why then would such well-respected free-market sources as

The Wall Street Journal editorial

page, the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute accuse Bush of being a "big-government Republican" who allowed spending to increase from 18.2% to 20.7% of GDP? No President since LBJ more increased the size of government, not even his father.

Rove ignores the fact that George W. vetoed only 12 bills during his entire eight years in office, the lowest number since Warren G. Harding. He adopted a policy of not vetoing any legislation when Republicans were in control of Capitol Hill. In fact, he never vetoed a single appropriations bill until late 2007—only a few months after Rove left the White House!

For years, I've been a member of the Council for National Policy (CNP), a who's who of political conservatives. Past and current members have included Ed Feulner, Steve Forbes, Phyllis Schlafly, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Jesse Helms, Tim LaHaye, Ed Meese, Brent Bozell, Rich DeVos, Joe Coors and Paul Weyrich. A few times the Bush insiders invited CNP members to a White House briefing (but never a White House dinner!), and at one such meeting, I complained about Bush's failure to veto any appropriations bill. I was told afterwards that I would not be invited back.

Rove insists that Bush was "pro-growth," claiming with a straight face, "The Bush years witnessed the longest period of economic growth since President Reagan." Gee, I don't recall Reagan ending his eight years in office facing the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, do you?

He claims that real GDP grew by 18.5% during the Bush years. By comparison, Reagan's eight years witnessed 30.4% real growth.

The stock market (S&P 500) under Reagan more than doubled (105%), while under Bush II it actually went down.

Rove claims that the Bush tax cuts created more than eight million new jobs. Of course, he conveniently ignores the 2.6 million jobs destroyed during the financial crisis of 2008. But even accepting Bush's claims, they pale by comparison to Reagan's 16 million new jobs and Clinton's 23 million.

Rove covers the financial crisis of 2008 briefly in his book, only two pages, but blames the entire affair on the Democrats' failure to support Bush initiatives to regulate Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. Barney Frank and Chris Dodd were "the true villains." If only the

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Democrats had granted the Bush Administration the regulatory powers it sought, the crisis would have been minimized, according to Rove.

Funny, Rove conveniently fails to mention the role of Bush HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson, who was accused of corruption and cronyism with Countrywide and other financial institutions. In 2004, Jackson worked hard to increase Fannie's and Freddie's "affordable" housing goals for minorities with subprime lending. And under his leadership, the FHA reduced its down payment requirements from 3.5% to zero in the midst of the financial crisis!

Sorry, Karl, but you can't blame the financial crisis on just the Democrats. There was plenty of blame on both sides of the aisle.

Rove defends Bush's prescription drug law as an example of "compassionate conservatism," noting that it introduced free-market competition and health-savings accounts, and thus reduced the costs of this additional Medicare benefit. But then Rove denies that the new entitlement enlarged the welfare state!

By that kind of reasoning, he probably would defend Bush's signing of the minimum wage law increase in 2007, which has destroyed millions of jobs for teenagers and minorities. So much for compassionate conservatism...

Finally, what about the collapse of the Republican Party during the elections of 2006 and 2008? Surely Karl Rove would take some responsibility for this political debacle? Actually, no. In his chapter, "Republicans on the Run," he says the Republicans lost not because of the unpopular war in Iraq, immigration reform or excessive deficit spending, but because high-profile Republicans were indicted on corruption charges (Tom DeLay, Mark Foley, et al.).

I could find only one mention in the entire book where Karl Rove claims to have made a serious mistake in policy (p. 457, regarding Katrina). Meanwhile, he devotes page after page describe his successes, such as the war in Iraq, whose long-term outcome is still uncertain.

I actually enjoyed reading his book, especially the details of his family life, his encounters with critics and working in the White House. It's a fun read, but ultimately, his book might better have been titled "Living in Denial." Tragically, we're still paying the price of the Bush-Cheney blunders. If they had done a better job of running the country, President Obama wouldn't have huge majorities in both houses of Congress, and much of his agenda, including socialized medicine, wouldn't be law today.

Mr. Skousen is a renowned financial economist, author and university professor. He has been the editor of the financial advice newsletter, [Forecasts & Strategies](#), for 28 years. Two of his books highlight Milton Friedman's career: "[The Making of Modern Economics](#)" and "[Vienna and Chicago, Friends or Foes?](#)" Check out his latest book "[The Big Three in Economics: Adam Smith, Karl Marx, And John Maynard Keynes](#)" or "[Investing in One Lesson](#)" and "[EconoPower: How a New Generation of Economists is Transforming the World.](#)" He is the producer of FreedomFest, the world's largest gathering of free minds, in Las Vegas every July (www.freedomfest.com).



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