



When Crown Publishing inked a deal with George W. Bush for his memoirs, the publisher knew it wasn't getting Faulkner. But the book, at least, promises "gripping, never-before-heard detail" about the former president's key decisions, offering to bring readers "aboard Air Force One on 9/11, in the hours after America's most devastating attack since Pearl Harbor; at the head of the table in the Situation Room in the moments before launching the war in Iraq," and other undisclosed and weighty locations.

Crown also got a mash-up of worn-out anecdotes from previously published memoirs written by his subordinates, from which Bush lifts quotes word for word, passing them off as his own recollections. He took equal license in lifting from nonfiction books about his presidency or newspaper or magazine articles from the time.

Far from shedding light on how the president approached the crucial "decision points" of his presidency, the clip jobs illuminate something shallower and less surprising about Bush's character: He's too lazy to write his own memoir.

Bush, on his book tour, makes much of the fact that he largely wrote the book himself, guffawing that critics who suspected he didn't know how to read are now getting a comeuppance. Not only does Bush know how to read, it turns out, he knows how to Google, too. Or his assistant does. Bush notes in his acknowledgments that "[m]uch of the research for this book was conducted by the brilliant and tireless Peter Rough. Peter spent the past 18 months digging through archives, searching the internet[s], and sifting through reams of paper." Bush also collaborated on the book with his former speechwriter, Christopher Michel.

Many of Bush's literary misdemeanors exemplify pedestrian sloth, but others are higher crimes against the craft of memoir. In one prime instance, Bush relates a poignant meeting between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and a Tajik warlord on Karzai's Inauguration Day.

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