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June 1, 2003
Evian, France

Dear Dr. Schizer,

Sorry to take so long to thank you for your review of the two books about me, but I am deeply appreciative of you taking up pen (or word processor) to set the record straight. Both books (with the partial exception of Carl Cannon's contribution to BOY GENIUS) are feverish leftism.

Also appreciated your earlier memo to Barn Jackson. I believe you are very much on target.

Best,

Karl Rove

JUN 05 2003

Carleton College
One North College Street
Northfield, Minnesota 55057-4075

Department of Political Science

April 3, 2003

Mr. Rove -

Thought you would be interested
in my review of two dubious
books about you. This review
will appear soon in The Hill.

Steve Schier

2003 APR 14 PM 5:40

Boy Genius: Karl Rove, the Brains Behind the Remarkable Political

Triumph of George W. Bush By Lou Dubose, Jan Reid and Carl M. Cannon 253 pages

\$15 Public Affairs Books

Bush's Brain: How Karl Rove Made George W. Bush Presidential By James

Moore and Wayne Slater 395 pages \$27.95 John Wiley and Sons

By Steven E. Schier

Political consultancy is a hardball occupation. The tactics are harsh, the hours are long and the stress is high. You are certain to make many enemies in this very competitive line of work, with the number growing as you succeed at the job. When you receive journalistic scrutiny, the people you have bested will come forth with dark tales of your duplicity. Karl Rove is perhaps the most successful political consultant of his generation. He has made many enemies. These two books quote many of them at length.

Though this often adds tang to the books' narratives, it does little to give the reader confidence in the books' recounting of past events. Each book contains all sorts of reminiscences about Rove, woven together into a critical narrative of his career. Moore and Slater thankfully provide supporting citations and an index, but Dubose, Reid and Cannon do not. References or not, the central problem with each volume is that most of the information related depends frequently on a single source, often hostile to Rove, recalling events from memory. This hardly makes for reliable history.

Nor will the evident partisanship of the books reassure the reader. Carl Cannon's account of Rove in the White House is refreshingly balanced, but the other authors have

their axes to grind. Dubose is coauthor with Molly Ivins of Shrub, a caustically hostile book on Bush, and another author of Boy Genius coauthored a campaign book for Gary Mauro, who ran against Bush for governor in 1998. An example from each book of the many snipes at Rove (and his boss) will suffice here. Dubose and Reid in their sections of Boy Genius describe Rove as a disciple of the Lee Atwater art of the "political smear" (p. 63) when discussing Rove's role in publicizing evidence of the false claims a statewide Democratic candidate in Texas made about her college record. Relaying such uncomfortable truths is a staple of hardball politics. The information was undoubtedly true and relevant to her credibility as a public official. So why is this a smear?

Dubose and company, however, are restrained compared to Moore and Slater. An early tip-off is the endorsement of Paul Begala on the back cover. No viewers of CNN's Crossfire will ever accuse Begala of disinterested analysis, and Moore and Slater are of the same ilk. Rove in campaigns pursues the "low road" (p. 196). Several times, anonymous Democratic consultants are brought forth to decry Rove's cynical political strategies. The authors' claims about Rove's power strain credulity. Rove, you see, is actually a "co-president." As they put it in their first chapter, "Karl Rove thinks it and George W. Bush does it" (p. 11). This is certainly a novel explanation of the Bush presidency, and the authors even give Rove credit for shaping administration policy toward North Korea and Iraq. The Iraq crisis looked "silly and manufactured" (by Rove) and the administration's response to North Korea's restarting of their nuclear weapons program "appears to have come from the mind of Karl Rove" (p. 318). Evidence for these imaginative claims is woefully lacking in the book.

Despite these important shortcomings, each book does have some intriguing passages. Moore and Slater provide interesting details about Rove's youth. Each book details political controversies in Texas involving Rove, including the bugging of his campaign office in 1986 and his consulting work for tobacco companies while advising then-Governor Bush. Given the obvious biases of the authors and the limits of their evidence, however, it is difficult to trust their accounts of these complex incidents.

These two catalogues of war stories, often single-sourced and related with partisan vinegar, miss much that is of lasting interest about Rove as a political figure. Rove's broader conceptions of American politics do receive fleeting attention in each book, but merit much more examination. Each book briefly discusses Rove's view that the 2000 election resembled that of 1896, and that William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt were politicians deserving of emulation today. The books also mention that Rove taught a graduate class at the University of Texas on electoral politics. There is much more that could be made of this.

Why? Though calling him a "co-president" is hyperbolic, it is clear that Rove has had an important impact on national electoral politics and public policy. Neither of these books really comes to grips with that impact. They instead create a Machiavellian portrait of Rove the person and tactician. But Rove clearly has an historical and strategic perspective that animates his tactics and is central to his impact on national politics and government. To understand Rove's impact, we need answers to several questions that neither of these books addresses in depth. What is Rove's strategic frame for understanding political campaigns? How does he incorporate particular political tactics into that strategic view? How does he explain the evolution of national political history?

What, in his view, are the main forces that shape political change in the past and at present?

These are big questions, and we get hints in the books that Rove has thought about them. Dubose and company quote Rove as saying that the 1896 and 2000 elections were two “in which party’s agendas were largely irrelevant or in danger of becoming irrelevant, in which each party had the responsibility of trying to come to cope with a changed . . . demography, changed economy, changed world situation, changed nature of the party and the declining power of each party’s elite” (p. 131). Moore and Slater hold that Rove styled the 2000 Bush campaign after the work of Mark Hanna who guided the McKinley campaign of 1896 (p. 16).

What is lacking in these books, then, is Rove’s substance. They portray him as an awesome political warrior who will do whatever it takes to prevail. We need better evidence than these books provide before we can accept that conclusion. Ultimately, Rove’s substance will explain much of his impact on national elections and policies. The campaign war stories related in these books do not get us close to that substance.

(1040 words)

Steven E. Schier is Congdon Professor of Political Science at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. His most recent book is [You Call This An Election? America’s Peculiar Democracy](#), published by Georgetown University Press.