



# Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency

*Barton Gellman*

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## **Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency** Barton Gellman

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Barton Gellman's newsbreaking investigative journalism documents how Vice President Dick Cheney redefined the role of the American vice presidency, assuming unprecedented responsibilities and making it a post of historic power.

Dick Cheney changed history, defining his times and shaping a White House as no vice president has before—yet concealing most of his work from public view. Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post reporter Barton Gellman parts the curtains of secrecy to show how Cheney operated, why, and what he wrought.

*Angler*, Gellman's embargoed and highly explosive book, is a work of careful, concrete, and original reporting backed by hundreds of interviews with close Cheney allies as well as rivals, many speaking candidly on the record for the first time. On the signature issues of war and peace, *Angler* takes readers behind the scenes as Cheney maneuvers for dominance on what he calls the iron issues from Iraq, Iran, and North Korea to executive supremacy, interrogation of Al Qaeda suspects, and domestic espionage. Gellman explores the behind-the-scenes story of Cheney's tremendous influence on foreign policy, exposing how he misled the four ranking members of Congress with faulty intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, how he derailed Bush from venturing into Israeli-Palestinian peace talks for nearly five years, and how his policy left North Korea and Iran free to make major advances in their nuclear programs.

Domestically, Gellman details Cheney's role as "super Chief of Staff", enforcer of conservative orthodoxy; gatekeeper of Supreme Court nominees; referee of Cabinet turf; editor of tax and budget laws; and regulator in chief of the administration's environment policy. We watch as Cheney, the ultimate Washington insider, leverages *his* influence within the Bush administration in order to implement his policy goals. Gellman's discoveries will surprise even the most astute students of political science.

Above all, *Angler* is a study of the inner workings of the Bush administration and the vice president's central role as the administration's canniest power player. Gellman exposes the mechanics of Cheney's largely successful post-September 11 campaign to win unchecked power for the commander in chief, and reflects upon, and perhaps changes, the legacy that Cheney—and the Bush administration as a whole—will leave as they exit office.

## **Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency Details**

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# From Reader Review Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency for online ebook

## Jay says

A friend of mine - who actually remains a friend - recommended this book to me, and the local library had the unabridged audio book. Furthermore, Barton Gellman is a great journalist, and this book is an acclaimed piece of journalism and biography. Hey, I got through Jane Mayer's "The Dark Side", right?

It was like listening to the biography of a tarantula. I kept having to fight the urge to spray my brain with Raid. I struggled through 3 CDs until I became so angered and disturbed by the subject of this biography that I had to put it down. Nevertheless, as a lifelong student (inmate?) of American History, I feel compelled to suck it up, learn something and have an other whack at this. (I did learn how Cheney cynically gamed the vetting process for potential VP's for Bush II to his own advantage. I won't spoil the shock value of this particular escapade, but I will say you would not want to share any confidence with this man, and "Dick" is a fitting moniker.)

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## Joe says

I checked out this book with a lot of interest. I will never see eye-to-eye with Dick Cheney on a majority of issues but I found his quest for power very fascinating. Gellman does a pretty solid job (though at times mildly repetitive) in summing up top-secret meetings & events which includes my personal favorite; Alberto Gonzales & James Comey rushing to the bed side of AG John Ashcroft.

Without spoiling too much of the book, you get a pretty good understanding of how Dick Cheney operated as VP and how aides such as David Addington (who might as well be the other figure in the book) gave him the power he needed. George W. Bush is for the most part, an afterthought and referred to like he is off-screen. There are a few times you have to remind yourself that Cheney wasn't the President and Addington wasn't his VP.

I learned a lot from this book and I recommend it to any history or political buff. Angler may not be the most exciting read, far from it, but I found it to be intriguing. I rented it from my college library but there's enough information in it for me to buy it cheap and read it now and then.

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## Steve Tally says

Angler, by the well-respected writer Barton Gellman, is an important book and a good read as well. Important, because it shows the multitude of ways that Dick Cheney manipulated the federal bureaucracy, which Cheney knew well, to form a wall around President George W. Bush. Bush was making decisions as president, certainly, but Cheney controlled the information delivered to the president and the people who had access to him. In that carefully controlled environment some of Bush's head-scratching decisions (compared to his earlier speeches and calls for a "compassionate conservatism") As disturbing as that is—a rolling Machiavellian overthrow by the vice president in a sense—Cheney's flouting of the U.S. Constitution is even more breathtaking. According to the book, there were many secret presidential orders described that were so

classified that only a handful of people were even aware that they even existed and were locked away in safes in Cheney's office. All of the orders were for the purpose of reducing the civil rights of American citizens. Up to that point nearly all U.S. vice presidents had been non-entities as far as American history was concerned, so ineffective that it called into question whether the office of the vice presidency was even needed. Gellman's Angler shows the opposite extreme, a vice president all too effective and controlling whose term in office points out how shielded from oversight, and therefore terrifyingly dangerous a vice president can be. A must read for all political observers and people interested in contemporary American history.

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### **Stephanie says**

Why am I reading this?!? Haven't I had enough of these scuzz bags? I read excerpts in the Washington Post before it came out in book form. Still... it's interesting to know that Cheney engineered copies of all emails sent to Bush by his cabinet to be sent to him, that Bush actually started out with a position on global warming before Cheney reversed course through some of his deft bureaucratic maneuvering. I'm blasting through this pretty quickly to get further exposure to the Dickster over with... but it's hard to undo all the tacky habits of living under the Dorky Duo...

I'm a little ashamed.

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### **emily says**

Terrifying, fascinating. Cheney comes off as an X-men-level supervillain and always, always the smartest guy in the room. I think, more than anything, I was really struck by the effort Mr. Gellman (and, by extension, I guess, everyone he interviewed) goes to to point out that G.W.B. was less dumb (and less apathetic) than we thought. This, honestly, sort of shakes up my whole worldview, but it also makes Cheney all the more terrifying in that over and over again we see that even the White House had no idea what he was up to.

(Also, worth reading the afterword in which we learn that Cheney himself rather enjoyed reading Angler.)

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### **Chris says**

I recently downloaded this audiobook on a whim from LA County library online system (check it out, LA locals). All I knew was that it was an in depth look at Dick Cheney in his role as VP, and that the author, Barton Gellman, had shared the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for his writing on Cheney with the Washington Post.

Gellman succeeds in taking 8 years of data (along with a lot of before and after) and boiling it down into a page-turning account of the man who was the closest our nation has ever come to having a "deputy president." Throughout the book I found myself both more able to understand and sympathize(?) with Cheney, and also much more disturbed by him, as well as by the actions of the US government before and after 9/11. Gellman paints a picture of a man who was surprisingly lacking in personal ambition, but who manipulated the government, the public, and even the president, along with international ethics and law, in the service of his own deeply held (but highly questionable) beliefs about the US and the world. Want to

know why we went to Iraq? Want to know how we ended up torturing people in Guantanamo? Want to know how the government flouted established law and began illegally monitoring your phone and email? Want to know why Bush campaigned on being a uniter but quickly became a divider once elected? Here's your book. Personally, not having read much post-game analysis of the Bush administration, I found the book most helpful in just re-thinking the events of that time period, absorbing the many details which only came out after the fact. (That's right, there actually were no WMDs in Iraq! Why did we ever think there were?) It also bears mentioning that Gellman offers his own analysis of these events and the people behind them: Cheney, Bush, Rice, Powell, Addington, and others. His work is not a bare statement of facts, but rather a careful and nuanced interpretation of the evidence. I'll leave it to savvier people to explain whether he gets it right or not. All I know is that I learned a lot and enjoyed myself in the process.

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## **Alec says**

Fantastically interesting piece of non-fiction tied together by a narrative worthy of an Aaron Sorkin drama. Specifically, the West Wing. Alright, I've never seen the West Wing, but if it is at all like this book, I am going to go out and purchase the DVDs.

In an era when Cheney bashing is as trendy as skinny jeans, this book is a breath of fresh air. Not because it is written from a pro-Cheney angle, but because it appears to be a sparkling piece of journalistic objectivity.

A ruthlessly effective man of conviction and single-minded determination, stories of Cheney fill this 400 page volume, however there is also significant insight into how our government works at the highest levels.

Whether you are a Cheney-lover, or a Cheney-hater, I cannot recommend this book enough.

P.S. One of my favorite parts might have been in the epilogue where the author mentions that Cheney sent him a signed picture of Cheney reading this book. Cheney had some complaints, but he still recommends this book to people saying "the author did his homework." Fantastic.

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## **Ray says**

This was an excellent book, based on Barton Gellman's Pulitzer Prize winning 2008 investigations and writings on National politics. As a Washington Post writer, Mr. Gellman had access to many in Cheney's inner circle and the Bush White House to put together this informative description of the Vice President's role in setting the tone and direction of the Administration. We've seen political cartoons over the past eight years with Dick Cheney as the ventriloquist, pulling the strings and putting words into the mouth of the Bush puppet sitting on his knee. A harsh depiction, perhaps, but as this book shows, there were some reasons for how that view became popular. How much of that stereotype was true, and how much was false was hard to know, until this book became available. This book answers a lot of those questions. It truly filled in a lot of gaps in my understanding of the inner workings of the Bush Administration. Cheney had widely been reported to be the most powerful Vice President in American history. Few, if any, recent books explore the dynamics between the President and Vice President. Gellman does, and paints a clear picture of Cheney and his power, consistent with everything we've heard and read over these past eight years. The book also talks of other key members of Cheney's team, like David Addington, who was so central to many of the more

unpopular and controversial initiatives of the Bush years. Gellman also points out some of the few in the Administration who were able to stand up to the powerful Cheney / Addington team such as Deputy Attorney General James Comey. (Comey was acting Attorney General who did not give in to the pressure from the White House to sign off on "illegal" spying when Ashcroft was hospitalized). If you're interested in understanding how Bush, who entered the Office as a Candidate envisioning policies such as "compassionate Conservatism", limiting global-warming, being a Uniter, championing Education reform and limited government, and then seemed to evolve into one of the Nation's most unpopular chief executives, should find this book very interesting. As Steve Clemons in the American Conservative stated, this is "an indispensable volume without which the Bush Presidency can't be understood".

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## Remo says

This book provides an interesting perspective on how to take over the entire policy process in Washington. It is not a flattering book, and the author clearly is not a Cheney fan, but an interesting portrait of the former VP comes out anyway. VP Cheney offered to be President Bush's "detail guy", handling things the President didn't want on his plate. The first step (after leading a search for a vice presidential candidate and rejecting all comers) was to be put in charge of the transition, during the contested recount. Cheney realized that "personnel is policy", and advocated people of his choosing in lower level positions in departments' policy shops so he could control the flow of policy recommendations bubbling up from the bureaucracy. Once the right people were in place he could shape how policy was formed from the bottom up, and control how it was decided on at the top. (Those people also provided valuable back-channel information to him.) He had his aides declared advisors to the President, allowing them to sit in on policy discussions at levels below him. Cheney himself sat in on Principal Committee meetings, which had never routinely occurred before. The President chairs these when he attends, but usually the National Security Advisor chairs for him. This gave Cheney a voice in the meetings, and because he routinely briefed the President privately it allowed him to advocate his positions outside the normal policy flow – exactly contrary to the way Cheney operated when he was White House Chief of Staff to President Ford.

Cheney got office space on the House side because the House is where tax revenue (taxes) originates, so he could have a voice in tax policy. He sat in on numerous other meetings normally too low-level for a VP, then briefed the President and made recommendation. Cheney's capacity for work was enormous, and his attention to detail phenomenal.

Chapter 4, Energy in the Executive, provides a case study in how to manage an errant boss (on the topic of climate change). This chapter highlights the Cheney didn't really care about politics, he cared about just doing what he thought was right. Other chapters go into a lot of detail on different cases Cheney weighed in on. The war on terror, torture, the clean air act, other environmental issues, taxes, the war in Iraq.

A chapter that really addresses a different side of Cheney is Chapter 9, Demonstration Effect. I'm not sure the author wanted to show how deep Cheney was, how nuanced his world view, but it comes out anyway. The chapter looks at the beginning of the Iraq war, how Cheney pushed it and what he was trying to achieve. Cheney looked for pivot points and threshold questions. He took a long view, especially in international relations. "Can you modify regime behavior without regime change?" One person interviewed said he was able to process information faster than anybody else in the room. (Powell, Rice and Rumsfeld were in the room.) I doubt history will be kind to the former VP, but it is clear from this book that he was a brilliant man

striving to do what he thought was best for the country. Unfortunately, it probably wasn't.

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## **Dave Metge says**

### **Learned**

1. Cheney is the man behind the power. He had his hands in \_everything major\_ or so it seems. As I read the book, it seemed like many major decisions were made w/o proper vetting/procedures being followed. THus, it seem like there were almost no types of consultation or critical thinking involved in making and enacting the decisions. From Abu Grab to torture to Fed rates to water management; this guy was making major policy decisions, often with minimal presidential .
2. Bush comes off as relatively inept/incurious/clueless president who basically signs off on just about every major decision manufactured by Cheney & his group.
3. THere are some links to Greenspan and at some point the Fed Chair became a relatively regular lunch guest at the WH, meeting with both Pres & VP.

### **Didn't know but now know**

1. Iraq info most likely "ginned up' with Tenet & FBI director out of the loop.
  2. With Cheney's hands in a lot of circles, the OVP was able to unilaterally shape policy.
  3. THe fact that he seems to think that the OVP was not part of the Executive branch and therefore somewhat immune from exec-oriented laws suggests that the VP office was pretty much operating as a show unto itself.
  4. Also, because he wants to now seal his papers and keep them classified suggests that we won't know what he was up to for quite awhile.
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## **Ronspross says**

The Bush administration has been the most damaging one of my life -- and I can remember Eisenhower. The former President still has his apologists who claim he is intelligent, well informed, and engaged. There is no evidence for this whatsoever. The man exhibited no acquaintance with anything other than the cultural prejudices with which he grew up and no awareness of the existence of a host of alternative prejudices. The lack of intelligence or deliberation is evident in the fact that he demonstrated no uncertainty that there might be alternatives to any of his notions.

Cheney saw this early on -- at least as early as the time during which he was Bush's "vice presidential search committee". Cheney realized, I am quite sure, that were he to be the Vice President, he could control Bush and manipulate him, achieving in the VP role virtually every thing he might otherwise only be able to achieve as President. The book Angler confirms this.

The Republican Party, in control of the other branches of government for most of Bush's term, abdicated its constitutional responsibility as a co-equal branch of government, bending to the political machinations of the administration, even when they were clearly violating or ignoring the Constitution themselves (e.g., abrogating treaties, issuing signing statements, etc., etc). Mickey Edwards, a former Republican congressman from Oklahoma, has written a book is an indictment of the GOP in this regard.



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## **Nathan says**

11/11: Hits the ground running with Cheney's terse, intrusive manipulation of the 2000 vice presidential vetting process, which turned out not to be necessary since Cheney chose himself as vp.

11/12: No surprise. Cheney gives his higher-up subordinates comparable positions in the president's staff, finesses himself into the Principals Committee and the Senate Republican Caucus, and makes himself a confidential adviser to the president on a level with the national security adviser. Most readers would probably be surprised to find out how unprecedented it was for a vice president to make himself essentially co-equal with the president, but the fact that Cheney is in this position is well known. Most revealing is Cheney began amassing this power during the disputed 2000 election.

11/14: Should I have known Jim Jeffords quit the GOP in large part because Cheney wouldn't budge on an education initiative? Should I be surprised that Cheney helped to shift the White House public position on global warming, essentially under the president's nose? Should I?

11/16: A bold assertion, to argue that Cheney fundamentally misread the Federalist Papers in his quest for an unaccountable, unitary executive. Guess I'll have to read those next? And was it wishful thinking for Gellman to note that Cheney wouldn't have made it to the underground bunker in time if American 77 had been aiming for the White House?

Skip a few days...

12/8: Other than a few back-handed digs that reveal something of the author's personal opinions, which would be rather difficult to conceal, this is a surprisingly even-handed account of a man who amassed as much power in the executive branch of the United States government as possible, with little regard for the political implications or the effects on civil liberties, because in his own estimation he felt he was doing the right thing. The author does not seem to think Cheney was deliberately trying to undermine the Constitution. He was trying to construct a political dynamic that would keep the country on a war footing for an indefinite time. The reader's own political leanings may well determine the rightness or wrongness of Cheney's goals.

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## **Jack says**

A petrifying view into the imperial vice presidency, with an amazing array of Washington insiders - many quoted by name for the first time. Gellman's research is prodigious, his access is amazing, and the sometimes previously unknown stories are often chilling.

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## **marcali says**

add a crunchy top layer to the political casserole created by The Bush Tragedy, The Terror Presidency, Bush's Law and many many NYer articles.

neat summary of these past eight Wonderland years:

A three-judge panel in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit...said the classified files contained mere assertions, not evidence. When the government declared the intelligence reliable because it appeared in three different documents, the judges mocked that reasoning. "The fact that the government has 'said it thrice' does not make an allegation true. See Lewis Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark* 3 (1876) ('I have said it thrice: What I tell you three times is true.')." The Bush Administration "comes perilously close to suggesting that whatever the government says must be treated as true, thus rendering superfluous both the role of the Tribunal and the role that Congress assigned to this court," the court wrote.

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## **Mark says**

The best political book I've read about the Bush administration. A remarkably even-handed and detailed profile of Cheney's years in the White House. It destroys a lot of the more ludicrous ideas of Cheney's motives while revealing things that are so calculated and unyielding that it's shocking. On one hand, Cheney's secrecy goes as far as to even hide things that would dispel myths about him, like his forfeiting millions in Haliburton stock options. On the other hand, he and his chief lawyer David Addington and John Yoo went to bizarre lengths to circumvent America's adherence to the Geneva conventions. He also would deftly manipulate both sides of arguments before they were ever brought to Bush. And yet, Cheney more than anything wanted to protect America from another attack like 9/11, yet in doing so, caused untold damage to our credibility and ability to influence events around the world.

Great journalism, and some chilling stories. And who'd have thought John Ashcroft would turn out to be a hero?

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## **Daniel says**

Why do people hate Dick Cheney? I read this book for answers and, happily, I can say Gellman delivers. The book starts weakly by making some innuendos about Cheney regarding a 'leak' about a VP candidate, Gov. Keating; the offended governor seems to believe only Cheney could have caused his troubles even though he admits he told several people about the subject when he was being cleared for an earlier job. Nevertheless, after this small misstep Gellman does a reasonably good job of illustrating what it is that drives people nuts about Cheney: his secretive use of power, his manipulation of the president's decisions through limits on information and opinions, and, of course, his positions on certain emotional issues. The last point can cut different ways, of course, depending on how crazy you think his views are. So, for example, I don't like his opinions about natural resources versus ranchers' rights, but I understand that's because I'm an urbanite and he's a Westerner. On the other hand, his ominous invocation of the Dark Side and references to using any means necessary to get information to protect Americans - well, that's harder to love, of course. But Gellman's book really shines in two respects. First, he makes it clear that it's not just Cheney's love of war and torture that enrages people, but his ends-justifies-the-means use of power behind the scenes. Second, and in confirmation of the first point, the author manages to write the in-house struggle to make the treatment of terror suspects legal and decent with suspense and great narrative force. The real hero of the episode turns out to be John Ashcroft, who has not been given his props.

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## **Garver says**

Gellman's exhaustively sourced and gripping account of Cheney's transformation of OVP could not be any

more fascinating. Getting beyond all the conspiracy theories and general nutjobbery that surrounds the man, the book tells a story of an almost Greek tragic hero -- a man so blinded by ideology and a lust for secrecy that he may have been at once the most effective and destructive holder of the office. Starting with Cheney's appointment to the ticket (recall, he ran Bush's VP search committee in 1999) and moving from his architected consolidation of white house power to a climactic, gripping account of near Watergate-level insurrection at DoJ, Gellman tells a tale all the more engrossing for its veracity.

I only have two real complaints. One, the book ends with about 75 pages left in the volume, which was disappointing (the remainder is dedicated to citations and sources) and two, it includes some assertions by implication that are frankly beneath the level of stellar journalism otherwise found in the Angler series. "Nobody could prove that Cheney did NOT drink iraqi blood out of thomas jefferson's skull..." kind of stuff -- though that may be because few people were willing to go on record.

In general the volume is not overly negative on Cheney (all things considered...) though it is clearly colored by the fact that people willing to spill the beans to a journalist are by and large among the (numerous) people that were wronged or alienated by the man.

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### **Michael says**

The author was a winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize. This book has the potential of making you mad, it did me. It focused on the full scope of Cheney's work and it's consequences, including going from al Qaeda to Iraq, spying on Americans, promoting torture, global warming, tax cuts for the wealthy, secret prisons, and how he operated politically in the White House. It's a great study of the Bush administration.

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### **Paul Donahue says**

Hipsters and other types of partisan Democrats love the idea of Cheney as someone beyond a mere political adversary, but someone who truly embodies pure evil. There were times during the Bush administration that everyone must have been suspicious of such a characterization. Cheney did himself no favors by cloaking all his decisions, benign and otherwise, in a veil of secrecy and it certainly didn't help that he looks generally sinister anyway. Gellman's book peels back the cloak to reveal somewhat of a different picture than the Rachel Maddows of the world would have you believe. But only somewhat.

Cheney is not evil. His secrets were not entirely based on the premise that they were morally and legally questionable and he didn't want you to discover them--though that certainly played a part. Cheney, more than anything else, was a brilliant policy mind who firmly believed in robust and unitary executive power. He did not adopt this view in 2001 to further his or Bush's ambitions, he has always believed it. That this view differs from the majority of the public, media, and other key players in DC made him a political adversary but does not by nature make him a bad person. His knowledge of the federal government and its sources of power enabled him like no other vice president to achieve his goals. His innovative interpretation of the vice presidency as an extension and not simply a representation of presidential power changed the world.

People love to compare the Bush administration to Watergate, and there are striking similarities. But the key difference is that Nixon abused power for personal and political reasons. Cheney did not abuse power, he did not ignore laws; he reinterpreted them, and he did it for policy reasons, not evil or political. He took debates

on things supposed to have only one objective answer--the law--and made them subjective, then used his intelligence and tools at his expense to win the subjective arguments. The very question of whether most of what he did was legal cannot be answered objectively--he changed the very merits by which we usually answer such a question.

But he did go too far. He did lie, and in some cases he very well may have broken the law. If deliberately lying to the House Majority Leader about national security secrets to make a case for war constitutes breaking a law, then Cheney broke it. When the Framers laid out our government, they might have been proud to know the chains and traps they included kept the chief executive of an evolving and expanding nation in check for over two hundred years. And they might have been terrified of just how far Dick Cheney was able to extend his reach. It is Dick Cheney who James Madison had in mind when writing the Federalist papers in favor of restrained executive power.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of all was that Cheney was able to do this as Vice President, an office literally intended to be an idle housekeeping and placekeeping position. Yet it seems unlikely that Cheney could've done what he did as President, where the tools of secrecy and back channels may not have been nearly as available to him.

As a friend of mine said, you can't fully understand the first decade of the 21st century without knowing the history of the Cheney Vice Presidency.

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## **Alison says**

Finished this book a few days ago, and I give it a strong recommendation. Gellman is meticulous to describe Cheney's modus operandi through its strengths and limitations, successes and failures. Gellman's assessment of the Cheney vice-presidency takes care to demonstrate what Cheney was and what Cheney wasn't. He pulls no punches in recounting the events leading up to the Bush administration's condoning of both torture and domestic surveillance. What was interesting to me was Gellman's treatment of Bush himself. Bush's managerial style acted as an enabler to Cheney's (and by extension, a very looming David Addington's) successes, executive power grabs, and complete and near-complete governing disasters, yet Bush figures almost not at all within the central narratives of the account. Not until the end does Gellman truly examine and make any comment on the unusual relationship.

Excerpt: "The critics missed something important. The formula was not empty. It was a syllogism, informed by the same old claim of unlimited power. 'Torture' was *defined* as 'what we do not condone,' as Bush put it. Whatever Bush did permit, Al Gonzales said, 'does not constitute torture.' *Quod erat demonstrandum*."

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