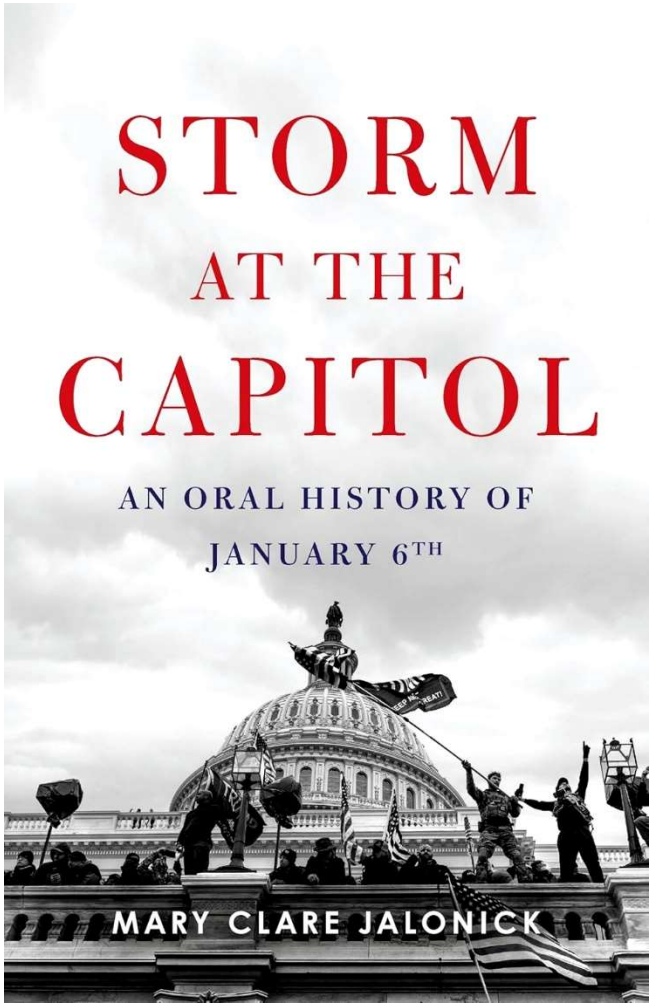
BOWLING GREEN DAILY NEWS

Jalonick reveals January 6 through those who witnessed it

Posted: Sunday, May 17, 2026

"Storm at the Capitol: An Oral History of January 6th" by Mary Clare Jalonick. New York, NY: PublicAffairs (an imprint of Hachette Book Group), 2026, 336 pages, $30.00 (hardcover).



"Of course, January 6th was especially traumatic for the hundreds of officers who defended the building and narrowly held off a much worse outcome," Mary Clare Jalonick explains near the beginning of "Storm at the Capitol: An Oral History of January 6th," her captivating new account of an event that continues to reverberate through our culture and political institutions right up to the present moment. "Around 140 were injured, but as one officer noted in an interview, the real number of injuries was likely much higher than that, and many of them simply returned to work without complaint. Others were so seriously injured that they never returned to work at all."

"I have collected the stories of some of the rioters as well, from court transcripts, FBI interviews that have been made public, official testimony, and personal interviews," the author continues. "Their stories sometimes defy stereotypes, and several of them have discussed falling down the social media rabbit hole of lies about a stolen election. Others have argued, in court and elsewhere, that the violence against law enforcement was justified or portrayed themselves as the victims of police brutality. Some regret their actions and some do not. Some walked into the building and left, while others destroyed property and beat officers with American flags. Almost all of them were pardoned by Trump when he returned to office on January 20, 2025."

So begins one of the more eye-opening accounts of a pivotal occurrence in our nation's history that some still feel has not been investigated nearly enough while others work hard to move on and even erase the relevance of that fateful day from our collective consciousness. To her credit, Jalonick works hard to provide both sides of the story, although her main allegiance is to the truth – as should be the case with these kinds of historical investigations. She is not interested in shaping a narrative; she simply wants the first-hand accounts of those who participated in the assault on the Capitol to see the light of day. Their stories are important to our shared identity and the desire by a majority of Americans to never allow such an assault on our democracy to ever repeat itself.

The comparative interpretation of the significance of January 6th is ultimately left to the reader. This is truly a nonpartisan investigation and analysis based solely on what the witnesses observed, experienced, and reported. The problem in the intervening five years has been the extensive efforts – direct and indirect, straightforward and more subtle – of politicians on both sides of the aisle, media from across the spectrum, and affected parties of various persuasions who have a stake in

how the insurrection is eventually described by future historians and political pundits to tailor the significance of the event to meet their often biased aims.

I found many passages simultaneously enlightening, frightening, and disgusting. Too many, in fact, to adequately address within the confines of this review. As an example, consider the account of what happened during the 2:00 pm hour by Officer Caroline Edwards, a U.S. Capitol police officer:

"Just as the police line broke on the West Front, rioters were breaking into the other side of the building as well. A large group had amassed at the historic Columbus doors, the grand East Front entrance that leads directly into the Capitol Rotunda. The heavy bronze doors, designed by the American sculptor Randolph Rogers and first brought to the Capitol in 1863, weigh twenty thousand pounds and stand seventeen feet high. But they were often kept open, leaving only a heavy glass door as the central entrance."

"The crowd had rushed the doors about thirty minutes earlier, and they were now attacking the small group of officers who were trying to keep them out. One rioter – the same man who had climbed a tree and displayed a Confederate flag at the rally earlier in the day – sprayed two officers at close range with pepper spray. Both were temporarily blinded, and one collapsed and lost consciousness as the crowd surrounded him, trying to push into the doorway."

"Member of the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys were scattered throughout the crowd, and at one point, a 'stack' of Oath Keepers, including Jessica Watkins, the bar owner from Ohio, approached the stairs to great fanfare. Dressed in their military gear, the group marched in a line, each with their hand on a shoulder in front of them."

In the following section, Jalonick provides the response from Jessica Watkins, U.S. Army veteran and bar owner, Oath Keepers, Ohio: "I was getting swept up in it. It was a cool moment. Everybody was excited to see us, you know? They were just like, 'Yeah, the Oath Keepers are here.'

Extensively researched, with nine pages of source notes and a 12-page 'Voices' appendix listing everyone she cites in the book, this is one of the more thorough treatments of January 6th that I have yet to peruse. After a short prologue that sets the stage for what's to follow, the manuscript is arranged chronologically by hour and covers early morning (prior to 9 am) on Wednesday, January 6, through early morning (after 3 am) on Thursday, January 7, 2021. An abbreviated timeline precedes the primary storyline, which gives the reader a concise overview of how everything unfolded on those two fateful days.

"Storm at the Capitol" contains two pictorial sections: eight pages of black and white photos (two per page) beginning at page 118 and another eight pages in a similar format inserted beginning at page 166. Many readers have no doubt seen many of these pictures, although it was my first time seeing a few of them, which piqued my interest even more.

I found the inclusiveness of those Jalonick interviewed for this book to be impressive. She includes virtually anyone and everyone who played a role in the multilayered events that cascaded throughout the course of the two days being chronicled. The professional and the personal are intimately intertwined in a way that seldom characterizes our experience, as highlighted by Representative Dan Kildee, D-Michigan:

"As I laid on the floor of the House Gallery, and as I called my family to tell them I was safe – even though I was not sure that I was – it occurred to me I was in the same spot where I sat forty-four years earlier as I watched my uncle Dale being first sworn into Congress. A beautiful memory. And now, that memory is replaced by one of me sheltering myself from a violent mob – a violent mob whipped up by a former president pushing a cynical and dangerous lie, determined to overturn an election and to keep us – Congress – from our constitutional duty to certify the election and ensure the peaceful transfer of power."

Previously a reporter for the Congressional Quarterly, Jalonick has worked for the Associated Press since 2005. She has a bachelor's degree in political science from Davidson College. She reported from inside the U.S. Capitol on January 6th.

As Ryan J. Reilly, author of "Sedition Hunters: How January 6th Broke the Justice System" (Hachette Book Group, 2023), notes: "Jalonick weaves together a riveting account of one of the most consequential days in modern American history, a day what will continue to reshape our country long after the statute of limitations expires. As some try to rewrite the history of the January 6th attack, Jalonick's book is a critical read for understanding the siege on the Capitol straight from those who lived it: law enforcement officers, lawmakers, journalists, and even rioters themselves."

I could not agree more. If you think you know what really happened, and you haven't read "Storm at the Capitol," rest assured you don't. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, WKU.