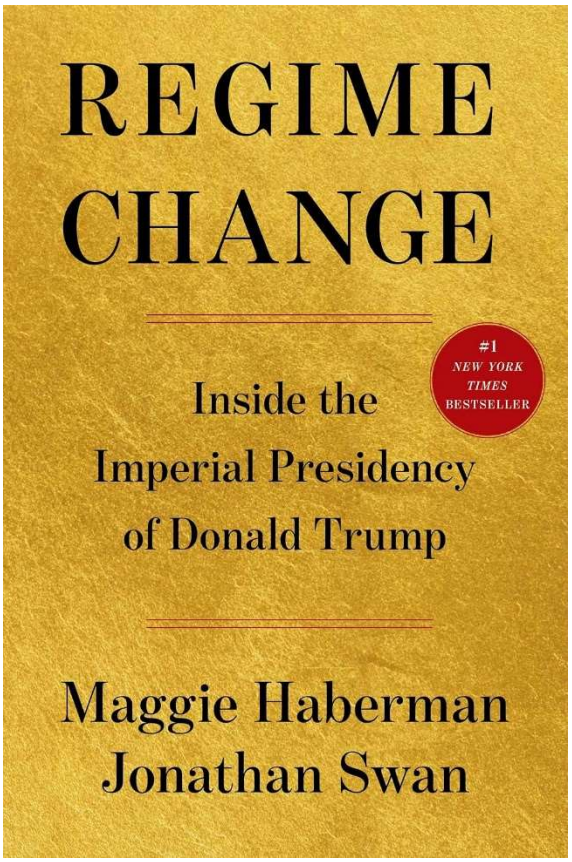
BOWLING GREEN DAILY NEWS

Regime Change: The inside story of Trump's Presidency

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"Regime Change: Inside the Imperial Presidency of Donald Trump" by Maggie Haberman & Jonathan Swan. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2026, 496 pages, $34.00.



"Trump entered his first presidential term as a novice, uncertain of how Washington worked and frightened of a special-counsel investigation whose dimensions he couldn't quite make out," Maggie Haberman & Jonathan Swan explain near the beginning of "Regime Change: Inside the Imperial Presidency of Donald Trump," their blockbuster new account of the impact one man has had – and continues to have – on the collective wellbeing of our nation. "And while much was written about the disruptions of his first presidency, and all the norms he violated, those concerns now seem quaint."

"He filled his cabinet with well-credentialed strangers, generals like James Mattis and John Kelly, who regarded him and his worldview as dangerous and detestable," the authors continue. "When they told him he needed to keep troops in Afghanistan and off the streets of American cities, he submitted to their counsel. But by the end of his term, he deeply resented the effect they had had on his presidency. He resolved to govern differently the next time, if there was to be a next time."

You've heard about it on all the major networks; you've seen the authors being interviewed countless times on national TV and in various podcasts. If you're wondering if "Regime Change" deserves all the praise that has been heaped upon it since its debut, you can stop your speculation: It lives up to all the hype and then some. What Haberman and Swan have constructed is a spectacular expose that will go down in the annals of historical biography as one of the premiere primary sources of our era. Equal parts enlightening and horrifying, the picture Haberman and Swan paint is both instructive and cautionary. Future generations need to know exactly what kind of man the people elected to the highest office in the land – and the lessons that desperately need to be learned from that experience.

"Regime Change" is one of the more extensively researched tomes (and clocking in at 496 pages, that is an apt description) I have had occasion to peruse in recent memory, with 23 pages of source notes at the conclusion of the prologue, introduction, 33 chapters and epilogue that comprise the main narrative. Structurally, the manuscript consists of three major sections: "Part I: Whirlwind," which is made up of the first 13 chapters, "Part II: Retribution," the next 10 chapters, "Part III: The Enemy Within," the following four chapters, and "Part IV: Plunder," the concluding five chapters. The literary style is precise, exponentially corroborated, and infinitely engaging - investigative journalism at its best. Seldom did a new page fail to bring an enhanced

level of understanding to the torrid tale Haberman and Swan are laying out in this rigorously methodological and not-easily-challenged treatise.

The book simultaneously confirms and magnifies the suspicions many – from both parties – have had about Trump for years, if not decades. One example of this (and "Regime Change" is chock full of them) can be found in chapter 17, in the "Retribution" section:

"While it was true that Trump's days were loosely structured and his meetings were almost entirely unstructured, it was also true that information was guarded much more closely and far fewer officials were in the loop than ever before," Haberman and Swan write. "He relied on a small core group, overseen by Wiles, that was more aligned than any configuration of this staff in his first administration. They kept information to themselves, mostly away from the media and from their own government. Senior officials at key agencies or on the National Security Council were often in the dark about major policies being hammered out in meetings."

"Trump made decisions so rapidly, and with so little process, that to be absent from the West Wing was not just to lose your chance to shape a policy – it was to lose your chance to know about it before the rest of the world did," they continue a little later. "Rubio was a case study of this dynamic. As secretary of state, he was America's chief diplomat, but he would spend less time abroad than any secretary of state in recent memory. After he added the role of national security advisor, he spent almost all his time in the White House… The reason State was in the loop on what was happening, he would tell associates, was because he was in constant proximity to Trump and his decision-making rather than locked away on the seventh floor of the State Department. If you were not by Trump's side every day, you might as well not have existed."

A White house correspondent for The New York Times since 2015, Haberman previously worked for the New York Post, the New York Daily News, and Politico. She as part of a team that won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for their reporting on Trump's ties to Russia and that relationship's potential impact on the 2016 presidential election. The winner of the White House Correspondents' Association's Aldo Beckham Award as well as the Newswomen's Club of New York's Front Page Award for Journalist of the Year, her previous work includes "Confidence Man: The Making of Donald Trump and the Breaking of America," which was published in 2022. She currently lives in New York City with her husband and their three children. Originally from Sydney, Australia, Swan is also a White House correspondent for The New York Times who has reported on Trump since 2015. His resume includes stints at Axios, The Hill, and The Sydney Morning Herald; he won an Emmy Award for his 2020 interview of Donald Trump and – like his co-author - won the White House Correspondents' Association's Aldo Beckman Award. Now a U.S. citizen, he resides in Virgina with his wife and children.

As is usually the case with these kinds of fact-finding adventures, it's the personal dimension that I find most intriguing. The public escapades, including their back stories, are often what grabs the headlines. But it's the habits that populate an individual's lifestyle that can reveal aspects of their inherent nature that serve to explain quite a lot about what kind of person they actually are. Consider the following from the eight chapter in the "Whirlwind" section:

"A nighttime snacker, the President would frequently leave an array of empty potato chip bags, Starbucks wrappers, and ice cream cartons in the trash, or on the floor. The staff had to begin monitoring the trash after it was discovered he was sometimes throwing out White House sterling silver utensils… Trump, a television addict, had three sets installed in his personal quarters, just as he had in his first term: two for the bedroom and one for the bathroom. Trump's preferences for a fully carpeted bathroom had posed a challenge for the residence staff during his first term. The portion nearest the shower would often be soaked through; the staff was never quite sure why, but they worried about mold growing underneath. The solution was to lay a small

piece of the same carpet – never an actual bath mat – over the larger one. Several of these pieces were kept in rotation, swapped out and dried."

One of the most informative – and one of the most loathsome – passages is found in the epilogue. Read this very carefully and then reflect on it for a while:

"What was revealing was not really that Trump agreed with the thesis {that using unchecked power was his prerogative} but the way he inhabited it: the evident pleasure he took in the company of Mao, Hitler, and Stalin, masters of state control through murder, torture, and detention, and Napoleon – and the untroubled ease with which he shaped a place among men who had reshaped the world through conquest and fear. He drew no distinction between those who built and those who destroyed, between those who liberated and those who enslaved. What mattered was that they had huge power – and that he had more."

Warning: Do not read this one right before bed if you don't want to toss and turn all night. Whatever apprehensions you have had about Trump's motivations, you have probably underestimated his capacity to defile and degrade the American experiment. Highly recommended.

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