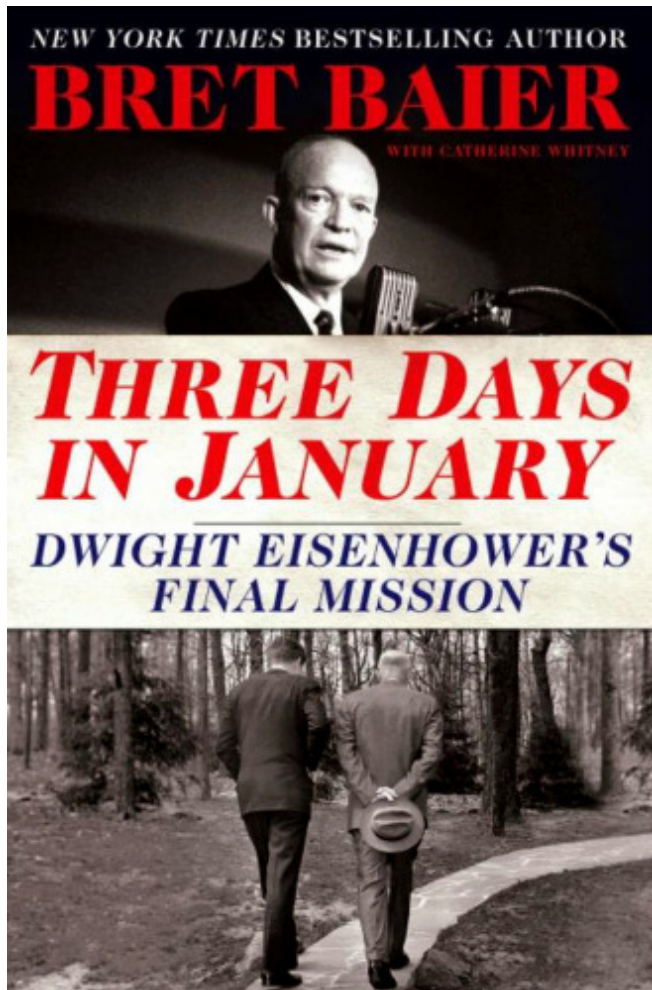


## Baier focuses on Eisenhower's final mission

Posted: Sunday, January 29, 2017

*“Three Days in January: Dwight Eisenhower’s Final Mission” by Bret Baier with Catherine Whitney. New York, NY: William Morrow (an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers), 2017, 368 pages, \$28.99.*



“We easily speak of men like FDR, who led us through a great world war, or Ronald Reagan, who faced off with the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to help wind down the Cold War,” Bret Baier explains near the beginning of “Three Days in January: Dwight Eisenhower’s Final Mission,” his new book about the three days between President Eisenhower’s final address to the nation Jan. 17, 1961, and the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on Jan. 20, 1961.

“But we dismiss the man whose epic presidency saved the world from nuclear disaster and in the process created a new narrative about how we can use our power for the greater good,” he continues. “With the world still struggling to re-order itself after the upheaval of World War II, the Soviet Union and China expanding their influence, and the Korean conflict no closer to being settled, Eisenhower took office at one of the most dangerous times in our history.”

“Three Days in January” is meticulously researched, with 25 pages of source notes at the conclusion of a prologue and 13 chapters arranged in three major sections: “The Setting,”

“The Speech” and “The Final Mission.” I especially appreciated Baier’s inclusion of the transcript of Eisenhower’s speech as a supplemental resource. Since much of the book revolves around this pivotal address, it is essential to establishing the context for much of what he asserts about the outgoing leader’s effort to help shape the national dialogue after his departure. Indeed, the themes embedded in his last attempt to define the political agenda for the 1960s and beyond animate Baier’s assertions – and they still resonate today. During the course of his remarks, for example, he warned against the inherent threats posed when bipartisanship is allowed to become more important than national interest, when deficit spending is allowed to drive the budgeting process, when the military-industrial complex is allowed to expand unchecked, and when special interests are allowed to supersede the common good. Sound familiar?

Even though Baier is not a journalist I typically look to for insights into the meaning of global events, I have to admit I thoroughly enjoyed this enlightening volume. I was born at the end of the Eisenhower Administration and can recall my father characterizing Ike using the same naïve and

stereotypical language the author sets out to debunk throughout much of the manuscript. He was a complicated figure and his legacy remains shrouded in the mythology that has only continued to ferment since he passed away almost a half-century ago. The quintessential embodiment of the military, during the early 1940s, he arguably had the most important leadership assignment in the world: the preservation of Western Civilization. During the postwar era, however, most of his efforts were centered on maintaining a delicate and often challenging peace among the former allies.

As is usually the case with this kind of character study and cultural critique, I found myself particularly drawn to depictions of the personal lives of the main characters. Most of the details of Eisenhower's career accomplishments have been well-documented. What is less known, and where Baier really shines, is the day-to-day existence the man pursued when the cameras stopped rolling and job responsibilities were left back at the office. To get a better sense of what I mean, check out the following passage from "Ike's Hidden Card," the fourth chapter and one of my favorites:

"As his second term drew to a close, Ike found himself enjoying more than ever the bucolic family life the farm provided. With John and his wife, Barbara, and the grandkids living in a house on the property, the atmosphere was happily boisterous, with children racing up and down the stairs and Mamie calling out 'Hands off the wallpaper... use the banister!' Simple pleasures meant everything to Ike – family barbecues, reading the Sunday paper on the porch while Mamie knits hot-water bottle covers – usually in pink – or answered correspondence (She replied to every letter she received, by hand.) Fishing with the grandkids in the little trout pond on the property. Hitting balls on the putting green. Christmas mornings, with the gifts piled up to the sky. Ike had an unwritten rule not to discuss business and politics at home, and he mostly managed to follow it."

Baier is chief political anchor for Fox News Channel, where he is also anchor and executive editor of "Special Report with Bret Baier." He has a bachelor's degree in political science and English from DePauw University. Before becoming an institution at Fox, his career included stints with local stations in Rockford, Ill., Raleigh, N.C., and Beaufort, S.C. This is his second book; his first was "Special Heart: A Journey of Faith, Hope, Courage and Love," a personal account of his son's battle with congenital heart disease, which he wrote with Jim Mills in 2014.

Given his disdain for the spotlight, it is easy to forget that Eisenhower successfully negotiated an end to hostilities in Korea, kept an apocalyptic nuclear exchange with the Soviets from becoming a reality and oversaw one of the most sustained economic upturns the country has ever experienced. As alluded to throughout "Three Days in January," many present-day politicians could learn a great deal about the nature of leadership by studying Ike's unwavering dedication to a set of values that characterized not only his military accomplishments and his tenure in the White House, but extended to all aspects of his private life as well.

If you are searching for something to inspire you during the trying times we currently find ourselves in – or if you are looking for a roadmap detailing how we can best navigate the turbulent waters that lie just ahead – pick up a copy of "Three Days in January." By the time you finish it, you might just be surprised at how your outlook has taken a positive turn.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*

*Editor's note: The author will speak about his book at an event sponsored by Warren County Public Library at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Knicely Center on Western's South Campus. Books will be for sale at the event.*