

FRANKLY WE DID WIN THIS ELECTION
The Inside Story of How Trump Lost
By Michael C. Bender

INTRODUCTION

Secret Service agents drew their guns and guarded the secret hideaway inside the U.S. Capitol where the vice president and his family sheltered. A swarm of rioters just outside the room smashed windows, busted through doors, and prowled along the waxed sandstone floors beneath the iconic cast- iron dome. It was January 6, 2021, and the symbolic heart of the world's longest standing democracy was under siege for the first time since the War of 1812. But instead of British troops in red coats, the insurrection was led by an American mob of President Donald Trump's supporters—and they wanted his running mate's head.

Vice President Mike Pence's offense: He had dared to defy Trump's order to violate the U.S. Constitution in an attempt to overturn the results of the November election. The frenzied crowd had already overrun the U.S. Capitol Police and the city's Metropolitan Police Department. Now, Pence's life—and the safety of just about everyone else in the Capitol that day—rested in the hands of the National Guard.

"I want them down here—and I want them down here now," Pence said firmly in a private phone call with the nation's top military and defense officials gathered at the Pentagon.

As this book chronicles, the storming of the Capitol was the culmination of one of the nation's most intense and unnerving election years, one that tested the very foundation of our democratic principles. I initially set out to write a traditional campaign book that would chronicle either the story of how Trump improbably marketed himself to a second term, or how the same traits that lifted him to victory in 2016 helped fell him just four years later. I envisioned this as a deep look at cutting-edge electioneering techniques heading into the quarter mark of the twenty-first century and anticipated explaining what those tactics told us about the cultural and socioeconomic dynamics that reverberated through our politics. I wanted to document the political phenomenon of the Trump mega-rally—from the behind-the-scenes staging to the campaign's collection of the invaluable personal data from attendees to the motivations of his supporters who waited for days outside arenas until he arrived.

But like nearly everything with Trump, there was nothing traditional about this campaign—and the story that revealed itself was far more chaotic and complicated. Without warning, millions of Americans stopped commuting to work, logged into Zoom, and stayed away from shops, restaurants, and even extended family members to avoid a bizarre and uncharted contagion. The

electoral kinetics shifted just as quickly and significantly. Trump's reelection bid suddenly hinged more on his response from inside the White House to a complex global crisis than on how his top political operatives would promote his past successes from campaign headquarters across the Potomac River. My expectations changed, too. Instead of spending the year on the campaign trail with a candidate I'd covered for five years, attending rallies hosted by members of his team I'd known for just as long, I only occasionally left my house once pandemic lockdowns started in March 2020.

The result is the story of the final year of Trump's presidency, which opened with his first impeachment in December 2019 and extends just beyond his second impeachment almost exactly a year later, in February 2021. It's informed by hundreds of hours of interviews with more than 150 members of Trump's White House, Cabinet, and campaign as well as friends and outside advisers—as well as by my own occasional run-ins, phone calls, and one-on-one interviews with Trump. Together their accounts reveal the deliberations behind the responses to the coronavirus pandemic and civil rights protests, explain why top lieutenants in Trump World remained in a constant revolving door between exile and repatriation, go inside-the-room during intense battles between Trump and his military advisers over whether to unleash soldiers on the streets of major American cities, and show how Trump spent more than twice as much money on a losing campaign as he had on a winning one. I also spent time with an eclectic group of Trump superfans who slept outside for days to secure their place in the front row of his mega-rallies, and whose stories of how Trump changed their lives help explain his enduring appeal to his base.

The heart of the story, of course, is President Trump, whom I covered for the *Wall Street Journal* during the 2016 election, all four years at the White House, and the 2020 campaign. As part of my job for the newspapers, I've interviewed Trump inside his corporate office in Trump Tower, on *Air Force One*, and one-on-one inside the Oval Office. Trump has praised my wavy hair as being worthy of a job in his administration. He complained about my reporting to my elementary-school-age daughter.

Many of my Trump World sources shared their firsthand accounts, internal campaign documents, text messages, emails, and calendars to help reconstruct key moments during the campaign. Some spoke for the opportunity to share what they had witnessed from their front-row seat to history. Others spoke for protective purposes, concerned that if they didn't tell their story, someone else would. Many spoke only on the condition of deep background, an agreement that meant I could share their stories without attribution.

I agreed to those conditions because my motivation to write this book was the same that many of my sources had for wanting to speak with me. I have had a remarkable opportunity to watch an astonishing chapter of our history be written, and I've been humbled by the chance I've had to speak regularly

with the people who shaped it. It's my hope that this book can add to our understanding of the people and events that have forever shaped our lives.

— Michael C. Bender, April 2021

*Excerpted from FRANKLY WE DID WIN THIS ELECTION: The Inside Story of How Trump Lost.
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