**A FEW NOTES FROM**

Woodward, Bob (2018). *Fear: Trump in the White House.* New York: Simon & Schuster. 420 p

*Bob Woodward is an associate editor at The Washington Post, where he has worked for 47 years. He has shared in two Pulitzer Prizes, first for the Post’s coverage of the Watergate scandal with Carl Bernstein, and second in 2003 as the lead reporter for coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He has authored or coauthored 18 books, all of which have been national nonfiction bestsellers. Twelve of those have been #1 national bestsellers.*

*Woodward draws from hundreds of hours of interviews with firsthand sources, meeting notes, personal diaries, files, and documents. Often with day-by-day details, dialogue and documentation, the book tracks key foreign issues. It reports in depth on Trump’s key domestic issues, and presents vivid details of the negotiations between Trump’s attorneys and Mueller. It discloses how senior White House officials joined together to steal draft orders from the president’s Oval Office desk so he would not issue directives that would jeopardize critical intelligence operations.*

(175) Real power is fear. It’s all about strength. Never show weakness. You’ve always got to be strong. Don’t be bullied. There is no choice. You’ve got to deny, deny, deny and push back on these women. If you admit to anything and any culpability, then you’re dead. ...You’ve got to deny anything that’s said about you. Never admit.

(xvii) Trump had been fuming for days about the KORUS trade agreement with South Korea (which was essential to their economy and to our national security). He would get in a bad mood and say, “We’re withdrawing today.” A letter doing that, dated September 5, 2017, appeared on Trump’s desk. Ray Cohn (National Economic Council Chairman) “stole it off his desk,” he later told an associate. “I wouldn’t let him see it. He’s never going to see that document. Got to protect the country.” In the anarchy and disorder of the White House, and Trump’s mind, the president never noticed the missing letter.

(27) Signs of Russian digital intrusions first appeared in local and state electoral boards’ computerized voter registration rolls in the summer of 2015. (28) In July of 2016, WikiLeaks and DC Leaks began publishing emails taken from a Democratic national Committee server. On August 4, John Brennan (CIA director), with Obama’s permission, told his Russian counterpart, Alexander Bortnikov, “You’re meddling in our election. We know it.” Bortnikov denied it.

(29) On October 7, 2016, James Clapper (Director of National Intelligence) and Secretary of Homeland Security, Jeh Johnson, released a joint statement officially accusing Russia of trying to interfere in the U.S. election. One hour later, *The Washington Post* released an audio outtake tape of Trump bragging about his sexual prowess ...and “You can do anything. Grab them by the pussy.” The Russia story essentially disappeared.

(30) Less than a half hour later, WikiLeaks capped the day’s news by dumping thousands of emails hacked from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta’s personal account online.

(163) Trump fired FBI Director James Comey on May 9, 2017 with the excuse that Comey had violated the rules by speaking about the Clinton investigation on July 5, and again 11 days before the election. (The official explanation soon fell apart as Trump contradicted himself on May 10 when he bragged to the Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak and foreign minister Sergey Lavrov that firing Comey had taken off the great pressure the Russia investigation created. Trump further contradicted himself on May 11, when he told NBC’s Lester Holt that he had planned to fire Comey regardless of Rosenstein’s conclusion, and that he was considering “this Russia thing” when he decided to do so.) (Comey only learned of his firing via a TV bulletin that appeared while he was talking with FBI staff in Los Angeles.)

(164) On May 16, *The New York Times* published a story about the Comey-Trump conversations on February 14, including “I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go...”

(165) On May 17, Rosenstein appointed Robert Mueller as special counsel. (Sessions had recused himself on March 2.)

(197) Over the weekend of July 8-9, *The New York Times* published two stories about a previously undisclosed meeting in Trump Tower in the middle of the campaign. Don Trump Jr., Manafort, and Kushner had met with a Russian lawyer who, among other things, was offering dirt on Hillary Clinton.

Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State, in a meeting with Priebus and McMaster on July 18: (211) “You guys in the White House don’t have your act together,” The president can’t make a decision. He doesn’t know how to make a decision. He won’t make a decision. He makes a decision and then changes his mind a couple of days later.”

After a heated meeting about Korea on July 20, Cohn asked Tillerson, “Are you okay?” “He’s a fucking moron,” Tillerson said so everyone heard.

(227) Later, Tillerson was thinking of resigning. In the office of Reince Priebus (Chief of Staff), Tillerson said “I just don’t like the way the president talks to these generals. They don’t deserve it. I can’t sit around and listen to this from the president. He’s just a moron.”

(234) Trump and Priebus talked during a flight on July 28 about how to announce Priebus’ resignation, which he had submitted the previous evening. Trump said “Maybe we’ll do it this weekend.” Then, Priebus walked off Air Force One and got an alert for a presidential tweet: “I am pleased to inform you that I have just named General/Secretary John F. Kelly as White House Chief of Staff” Priebus had just talked with Trump about waiting. ...Trump had not talked with Kelly about this.

(235) It made no sense, Priebus realized, unless you understood the way Trump made decisions. “The president has zero psychological ability to recognize empathy or pity in any way.”

(236) Months after his departure from the White House, Priebus made a final assessment: He believed he had been surrounded in the West Wing by high-ranking natural killers with no requirement to produce regular work products—a plan, a speech, the outline of a strategy, a budget, a daily and weekly schedule...

(237) “If you have natural predators at the table,” Priebus said, “things don’t move.” So the White House was not leading on key issues like health care and tax reform. Foreign policy was not coherent and often contradictory.

(239) Charlotesville, Virginia, August 12: After the violence, including one of the white nationalists driving his car into a crowd of protesters, killing a woman and injuring 19 others, Trump tweeted, including the ad lib “On many sides, on many side it’s been going on for a long time in our country...” with the phrase suggesting an equivalence between the neo-Nazis and those who opposed white supremacy. Biting criticism of the president spanned the political spectrum, including many Republican Party leaders...

(263) The honeymoon was soon over. Beginning in September, Kelly and Porter would be together alone, or with a few senior staffers.

“The president’s unhinged,” Kelly said. There would be something, especially about trade agreements or the U.S. troops in South Korea. “We all need to tray to talk him out of it,” Kelly said. They needed to stand up to the president. He wasn’t listening.

Oval Office business and decision making became increasingly haphazard. “The president just really doesn’t understand anything about that. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” Kelly said.

As Trump redoubled on withdrawing from trade agreements or costly foreign policies, Kelly would say, “I can’t believe he’s thinking about doing this.”

(286) In a small group meeting in his office one day, Kelly said of the president, “He’s an idiot. It’s pointless to try to convince him of anything. He’s gone off the rails. We’re in crazytown. I don’t even know why any of us are here. This is the worst job I’ve ever had.”

Gary Cohn (National Economic Council Chairman): (209) On February 23, 2018 Australian President Turnbull arrived at the White House to see the president, Cohn reminded Trump that he had said to Turnbull earlier he would not impose steel tariffs on Australia. Trump denied it. Cohn had witnessed this for over a year–denial when needed or useful or more convenient. “He’s a professional liar,” Cohn told an associate.

(271) “I don’t know how much longer I can stay, because things are just crazy here. They’re so chaotic. He’s never going to change. It’s pointless to prepare a meaningful, substantive briefing for the president that’s organized, where you have a bunch of slides. Because you know he’s never going to listen. We’re never going to get through it. He’s going to get through the first 10 minutes and then he’s going to want to start talking about some other topic. And so we’re going to be there for an hour, but we’re never going to get through this briefing.”

(296) The tax bill passed on December 20, 2017, adding an estimated $1.5 trillion to the annual deficit over 10 years. Tax reform was the only major legislation passed his first year.

(320) Senators Lindsey Graham and Dick Durbin had worked together to develop a compromise plan on immigration. On December 30, 2017, they came to the Oval Office to brief Trump. It included money for the wall. “It was not enough,” said Trump. “Haitians, we don’t need more Haitians.” At that and the mention of immigrants from African countries, Trump said, “Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here? Why not more Norwegians?”

(323) There were months of speculation that Tillerson was about to quit or be fired. He was in Africa when Kelly warned him in March 2018 to cut his trip short. “You may get a tweet,” Kelly said. The morning of March 13 Trump tweeted that CIA Director Pompeo was going to be the next secretary of state. “Thank you Rex Tillerson for his service!” was all he said about Tillerson.

(336) Staff Secretary Rob Porter resigned on February 7 after two ex-wives went public with allegations that he had physically abused them... Cohn saw that one of the main restraining influences on Trump was now gone.

(353) In March 2018, Trump called John Dowd (his personal lawyer) “Mr. President, I cannot, as a lawyer, as an officer of the court, sit next to you and have you answer these questions when I full well know that you’re not really capable.”

Dowd wanted to dress it up as much as possible... He could not say what he knew was true: “You’re a fucking liar.” That was the problem.

So Dowd said, “You do have trouble staying on the subject. And that can defeat you. Then you try to catch yourself, and you misstate something and bam. It’s like Mike Flynn not remembering the conversation with Kislyak.”

(356) Dowd called Trump and resigned “I back you. And I wish you the very best. But if you’re not going to take my advice, I cannot represent you.”

(357) But in the man and his presidency, Dowd had seen the tragic flaw. In the political back-and-forth, the evasions, the denials, the tweeting, the obscuring, crying “Fake News,” the indignation, Trump had one overriding problem that Down knew but could not bring himself to say to the president: “You’re a fucking liar.” (end of book)

last modified Sept. 24, 2018