

The book, *I alone can fix it: Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year*, was written by a duo of Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker. This book was the team's second book regarding Donald Trump's tenure at the White House. Although I did not read their first novel, I can assure you it can not be much better than this book they wrote. First off, Carol Leonning is an American investigative journalist. Leonnig has been with the Washington Post for over 20 years, as she began in 2000. Previously mentioned, she has written books before regarding politics. Carol is mostly well-known for her role on a group of national security reporters that took home the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. Leonnig's group were declared winners for revealing the NSA's expanded spying on Americans. Carol Leonnig has also won two more Pulitzer Prize Awards for national reporting in both 2015 and 2018. This was her third book she has written, again two of them being with Philip Rucker.

Philip Rucker's current title is the Deputy National Editor for the Washington Post. Rucker has been with the Washington Post for 17 years now, as he began his tenure in 2005. Rucker was previously the Senior Washington Correspondent as well as White House Bureau Chief. Just like Leonning, Rucker is also a 2018 Pulitzer Prize Award winner. He won his award for his role in a group that covered Russia's interference with the 2016 election. He has won many other awards as well, but the Pulitzer Prize being the most notable. Rucker has co-written two books, both of those were with Carol Leonnig.

This book was a fascinating read. 2020 had so many historical events that will be remembered for a long time. This book unravels with 100+ sources a deeper dive into the beginning and midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the racial movements with the murder of George Floyd and the election in 2020 with all of the claims Trump made about the fabrication of the outcome. This book was a compelling read because of how 2020 was a year

that had so much compactness into 366 days. I think the author's audience was targeted more towards the left-wingers compared to the right-wingers. I think the ones who disapproved of President Trump and the ones who seeked to see him fail may have enjoyed this book. It is kind of like when a sports team you despise is on a big losing streak. In my opinion, this was written from an unbiased standpoint. I think Leonnig and Rucker did an excellent job not giving their own personal thoughts and beliefs in the book. Instead, they let their sources tell the story. They gave the facts and that is what a journalist should be doing in any piece of work they have written. I enjoyed the wide variety of sources the duo used. The two authors implemented everything from interviews with Trump officials to government records located inside the White House.

The book was broken up into four parts based on a timeline. This made the book easy to follow along with and know where you were at during the hectic year of 2020. It is convenient that this is a read that is reflecting on the events that happened two years ago. Luckily, it is not a book that is from way long ago and was not alive for the events that took place during the book. "Although Birx had been appointed to her ambassadorship by President Obama in 2014, she prided herself on remaining apolitical as a civil servant. She knew enough about the daily dramas in Trump's Washington to want to stay away. As Birx confided to associates, she would have to be an idiot to sign up to work in the White House. Doing so, she figured, could be terminal to her long public health career. Serving Trump was the last thing she wanted to do.

But Pottinger resisted. Birx was studying the infection curves from Wuhan and Italy and was worried about the administration's approach given this virus had significant asymptomatic spread. She was alarmed by the Trump administration's initial moves, especially its public statements that the virus posed a very low risk to people's livelihoods. She started to think she

could help make a difference" (Leonning & Rucker, 2021, p. 68). This passage discusses Deborah Birx. Birx is an American physician who worked closely with President Trump. When COVID really first hit in the United States it was approximately February of 2020. She was describing how she did not want to deal with the Trump administration when looking at the global pandemic due to a potential lackadaisical approach. That stood out to me because it gave us an inside look on the approach the Trump administration was going to take before knowing how dangerous this virus was going to be. It was not until March when everything had shut down. Back to the point I made earlier, there were three major events that kind of ties this whole book together and COVID was one of them and the first one on the 2020 timeline.

The Black Lives Matter movement was another major aspect of the year 2020 under Trump's leadership. A large portion of this country disagreed with how the George Floyd murder occurred and the aftermath. Many citizens have had enough of police brutality, some even were hoping the police force would become defunded. At some points the revolt of the Black Lives Matter movement became violent. Buildings were vandalized and people were getting hurt.

"At about 6:30, a half hour before the city's 7:00 p.m. curfew, federal police in riot gear fired gas canisters, flash-bang shells and exploding munitions that released rubber pellets to force largely peaceful demonstrators out of the area. They struck protesters with batons and slammed into them with their shields. They sought to rush them by riding at them on horseback. "The air was just crackling with something as the police were piling up," Gerbasi recalled. "And suddenly there were screams and explosions... I looked up and saw a smoky trail coming from the park out to the street, and then just billowing smoke from that. We're seeing people starting to run towards us, and running toward us with their faces just red and their eyes burning... The police

on horseback, they're driving people down. Tear gas. It's like a war scene" (Leonning & Rucker, 2021, p. 167).

That passage was a really descriptive and accurate way to tell the story of the mayhem that occurred in those 5 or 6 days of the revolution of the Black Lives Matter movement. I do not know if I agree with everything that went on. Obviously, I do not want buildings to burn down and cities to be destroyed, but I do not like seeing and hearing the people that have been hurt by the authorities. The authors made it really livable. Based on the words and the phrases the interview sources were using really took me back to 2020 and painted a picture in my mind. A piece of the same chapter talked about May 28, the day the Black Lives Matter movements were really unfolding and the day the coronavirus death toll hit 100,000. What stuck out to me was President Trump choosing to not honor the occasion. "Instead Trump focused on other matters. In days leading up to the milestone, he played golf at his private club in Virginia, at the entrance to which his motorcade zipped past a small group of protestors holding up a sign that read: "I care do U? 100,000 dead" (Leonning & Rucker, 2021, p. 151). This is really strong evidence and a strong argument that these actions at that time were not acceptable.

All on top of this in November of 2020 the Presidential Election was held. An election President Trump lost to current President and former Vice President Joe Biden. After the election results were in, many including Trump himself claimed the election was rigged and demanded a recount. "I thought we were going to win," Trump said. "Why are they still counting votes coming in after the election? What's going on?" "We don't know how many votes are left out there," Oczkowski said. "No," Trump said. "We're winning this. This was stolen." Then, the president got Giuliani on the line. "You won," Giuliani told him. "They stole this thing" (Leonning & Rucker, 2021, p. 357). All of the falsehoods the Trump organization claimed was

the beginning of the downfall for President Trump. Although the storming of the capitol did not happen until 2021, these events were a main reason as to why those horrific events occurred.

There was strong evidence in proving the authors' point throughout the entire book. All of those passages I put into this paper were strong examples. Those few were just a very small portion of the many, many, many different examples of quality arguments along with strong proof these two and their sources knew what they were talking about. The authors support their arguments by bringing in all of these different interviewees from a ton of different platforms and all of the records they provided throughout the book. In the author's note they state that they conducted hundreds of hours of interviews with more than 140 sources. These sources include Trump administration officials, career government officials, friends, other advisors amongst much more. That is how you back up an argument. These two Washington Post employees did not just rattle off their own opinions for 500 pages, they brought in all of these different resources which was tremendous.

The conclusion supported the information released in the book. It basically wrapped up everything that was mentioned in the entirety of the story. They reiterated all of the major points talked about along with their final thoughts on President Trump's catastrophic year of 2020. The strengths definitely overpower the weaknesses, if there were any. The strength was the effort these two put in. To go above and beyond and write the best story they possibly could. They talked to so many different people that had relevant things to say regarding the topics the authors were writing about. As for weaknesses, there is not one that sticks out to me. People can say a 500+ page book is too long but there was nothing in there that was just wasted space. There truly was so much to unravel in one of the crazier years of my 22 years on this planet.

In the end, I agreed with this book pretty much wholeheartedly. I really enjoyed the writing of the authors and the words of those they interviewed. They all brought relevant information to the table and each interviewee taught me something new that I did not know before reading the excerpts regarding them. “Trump had no second thoughts about his handling of the pandemic. He has been “very tough” in protecting the country by restricting travel, first from China and then from Europe. He said he did so against the wishes of his top medical advisors” (Leonning & Rucker, 2021, p. 516).

I learned a ton when reading this book. To be honest, before taking this course I never really paid attention to politics. I do not do a lot but more now than I ever have before. I kind of got all of this info on basic news outlets and word of mouth, like my family discussing these issues. If it wasn’t for reading this book I would have no clue about any of this in-house discussion that occurred. I also learned that 2020 was an abysmal year on a couple different measures and was just really fascinating to learn about this from a lot of different angles. This contributes to the fact that the media is so important and how vital it is to tell the facts. The President, the man in charge of the entire country, did not give us all of the facts, so it is very important that the media is here to clean up the mess that the President spilled. Overall a great book and it was well worth it.

References:

Leonnig, Carol, and Philip Rucker. *I Alone Can Fix It: Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

Rucker, Philip. "Philip Rucker." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.