

20 THE PLOT AGAINST DEMOCRACY

COLLISION OF POWER: TRUMP, BEZOS AND THE WASHINGTON POST

By Martin Baron FLATIRON BOOKS (2023)

The Post's Truth-Telling Mission Found Its Ultimate Test In The Presidential Election Of 2020 And In Its Terrifying Aftermath.

Three Reporters Who Constituted *The Post's* Fact Checker Team Had Been Tracking Every False Or Misleading Statement Donald Trump Made Since He Was Sworn In As President. By October 2020, The Deceptions Were Coming So Rapidly That The Team Told Readers It Was Unable To Keep Up. In The Final Stretch Of The Campaign, Trump's Untrue Claims Were Running At More Than 50 Per Day. On August 11, They Hit A One-Day Record Of 189 (Reaching An All-Time High Of 503 On November 2). In The First Year Of His Presidency, He Averaged 6 False Claims *A Day*; Then 16 In 2018, 22 In 2019, 39 In 2020. During The Pandemic, When Trump Found Additional Reasons To Deceive, He Added 2,500 Coronavirus-Related Falsehoods Over The Entire Year. By The End Of His Four Years As President, *The Lies And Deceptions Added Up To 30,573.*

That Number Alone, No Matter How Astounding, Could Not Adequately Capture All That Was At Stake. A Nation Needs Fact As Its Anchor. Trump Was Cutting The Anchor Loose. "The Power Of His Lies Is No Merely In Their Tally But In The Escalating Demands They Make On Us," As *The Post's* Carlos Lozada Argued In His 2020 Book, *What Were We Thinking*. "First, We Are Asked To Believe Specific Lies. Then, To Bend The Truth

To Our Preferred Politics. Next, To Accept Only What The President Certifies As True, No Matter The Subject Of How Often His Positions Shift. After That, To Hold That There Is Really No Knowable, Agreed-Upon Truth. Finally, To Conclude That Even If There Is A Truth, It Is Inconsequential. Lies Don't Matter, Only The Man Uttering Them Does."

Cataloguing Trump's Deceit Was A Noble Effort — A Service To Citizens, History, And Truth. His Lies Had Accumulated Into A Cancerous Threat To American Democracy. But If Any Of Our Fact-Checking Resonated With Trump's Hardcore Base, I Didn't Detect It. Trump Had Labored For Years To Inoculate Himself From The Truth. He Would Fabricate His Own, And Then Have His Detractors Labeled As Liars Themselves.

The Pattern Was A Dismayingly Familiar One. Throughout History, Leaders Who Aspired To Authoritarian Power Had Done The Same. The Ranks Of Strongmen Worldwide Were Now Swelling Again — In Hungary, Turkey, The Philippines, And Elsewhere, Where The Press Proved A Convenient Enemy, Vulnerable Target, And Unsteady Counterweight. I Worried That The Mainstream American Press Faced The Same Fate Amid Trump's Grievance-Propelled Populism. Given Our Inability To Get Trump Loyalists To Reject His Smaller Lies — Or Persuade Them Even To Give A Damn — How Could We Gain Their Trust In 2020 When His Lies Ranked As The Most Sinister And Colossal In Modern American Presidential History?

There Were Journalism Pundits Aplenty Who Offered Advice: Use Stronger Language (Unequivocally Say More Often, And More Forcefully, That Politicians "Lie"). Refuse To Publish What Trump Says, Especially If He's Just Repeating His Lies. Refuse To Give A

Platform To Politicians And Their Operatives Who Made A Practice Of Joining His Most Dangerous Lies. Write And Broadcast Stories That Vividly Demonstrate That The United States Is In A Life-Or-Death Struggle For Truth And Democracy. Set Up Teams Of Journalists To Report Doggedly On The Threat To Democracy At Every Level Of Government.

Major News Outlets Were Justifiably Doing Much Or All Of That. Trump's Dishonesty, Along With The Hazard He Posed To Democracy, Received Relentless Coverage For Years. It Was Comprehensive, Thoroughly Documented, And Increasingly Blunt.

Trump's Most Devoted Supporters, However, Weren't Reading Or Listening To Media Outlets Like Mine. To The Extent They Paid Attention, They Saw Us Not As Delivering Facts So Much As Animus. And As *Politico* Media Columnist Jack Shafer Noted In Late 2022, The Facts Weren't What Concerned Them Anyway. "The Most Horrifying Thing About Trump's Constant Lies," He Wrote, "Is Not That He Convinces His Supporters To Accept Them But That His Supporters Don't Care That Much About Whether He's Telling The Truth As They Do About His Positions Or Affectations About The Culture War, Race, Immigration, Abortion, Grievance, Police, Trade, Guns And Political Elites."

And Yet I Still Had Confidence That Enough Americans Were Open To Genuine Evidence, That A Majority Were Interested In Separating Fact From Fiction, That Enough Didn't Truly Believe Journalists For The Most Renowned Media Institutions Just Made Stuff Up, And That The Country As A Whole Was Not Prepared To Cut The Cord With Objective Reality And Its Democratic Heritage. It Was More Than Faith On My Part: There Were

Millions Of Trump Voters Who Didn't Just Blindly Support Him. As President, He Had Never Achieved More Than 50 Percent Approval From The American Public, And His Approval Rating Had Fallen As Low As 37 Percent. For Most Of His Presidency, Gallup Polls Showed, Americans Rating Honest And Trustworthy" Fell In The Miserable Range Of 33 To 37 Percent.

Trump's Most Unwavering Loyalists Would Repudiate What We Published, But Not All His Voters Would. My Hope Was That, As Our Reporting Was Validated Over Time, Skeptics Would Look Past Partisan Rhetoric, Acknowledge Verifiable Reality, And Recognize The Calamitous Risks Of Denying It. It Was Hope Based On A Long History Of Our Country's Most Effective Journalism, Even When It Was Under Sustained Attack. Trump Had Made Our Task Harder, But I Was Not Prepared To Concede That He Had Made It Impossible.

I Also Knew That This Was A Story I Very Much Wanted To Be A Part Of. Overseeing Coverage Of Trump's Assault On Facts And American Democracy Would Constitute The Final Chapter Of My Career, And Arguably Its Most Important. Though My Disposition Had Darkened In 2020 Due To Internal Controversies, Now Was A Time To Focus Single-Mindedly On Actual Journalism. Nothing Mattered To Me More. Nothing Was More Meaningful. The Mission Of Journalism Is What Drew Me Full-Time In 1976 And Now It Would Carry Me Through To Retirement, When I Could Leave Our Newsroom Divisions Behind.

As We Neared The Election, I Was Grateful To Still Be Leading The News Staff Of

The Washington Post. I Was Relieved That My Offer To Resign Had Been Rejected. I Found Myself Newly Energized, Able To Beat Back Physical Exhaustion And The Gloomy Mood That Had Overtaken Me. There Was No Place I Would Rather Have Been Than At *The Post* At That Perilous Moment In History. For All Its Episodic Fractiousness, The Gifted Staff Always Pulled Together When Urgent News Demanded Unity Of Effort And Purpose. We Needed That Now. It Became Obvious We Would Need It From Election Day Until January 20 And Most Likely Well Beyond.

I Was Increasingly Convinced That Trump, If He Lost The Election, Would Not Willingly Leave The White House And That He Would Do Whatever He Could To Retain Power. The Man Who Had Always Loved Money And Attention And Clearly Came To Love Power Above All Else. He Could Never Tolerate The Idea Of Losing. It Became Increasingly Evident That He ***Simply Deny He Had Lost***. Facts Were Nothing To Him. Democracy And His Oath To “Preserve, Protect, And Defend” The Constitution Were No Dearer To Him, Either. He Enjoyed Fighting. He Would Fight To The End, And Fight Dirty. At *The Post*, We Were Prepared For That.

Anyone Familiar With Trump’s Political History Could Sense The Gathering Storm. Trump Had A Record Of Making False Accusations Of Fraudulent Elections. When Barack Obama In 2012 Defeated Mitt Romney, Whom He Supported, Trump Called The Election A “Total Sham And Travesty.” At The Time, Trump Was Grumbling That Obama’s Victory Was Based On The Electoral College, When It Initially Appeared That Romney Might Lead In Overall Votes. (Obama Ultimately Won The Popular Vote, Too, And By A Sizable Margin.)

In February 2016, Trump Claimed That He Hadn't Actually Lost The Iowa Caucuses, Which Kicked Off The Republican Primary Contests. *"Ted Cruz Didn't Win Iowa, He Stole It," Trump Tweeted, Adding: "Based On The Fraud Committed By Senator Ted Cruz During The Iowa Caucus, Either A New Election Should Take Place Or Cruz Results Nullified."*

Before The Presidential Election In 2016, Trump Said *He'd Accept The Election Results "If I Win."* Trump Didn't Give Up On Unfounded Accusations Of Fraud Even After Winning. He Had Prevailed In The Electoral College But Won *Nearly Three Million Fewer Overall Votes* Than Hillary Clinton, Capturing The Presidency Because Of An Electoral College System He Had Decried Only Four Years Earlier As A "Disaster For Democracy." Shortly After The Election, However, He Declared On Twitter That He "Won The Popular Vote If You Deduct The Millions Of People Who Voted Illegally."

Thousands Of Massachusetts Residents Were Bussed Into New Hampshire To Vote Illegally, He Claimed, Costing Him A Victory In The State. There Was, Of Course, Never Any Evidence Of That. He Made Claims Of "Serious Voter Fraud" In Virginia And California In The 2016 Presidential Election As Well; Again, No Evidence. A Few Months After Taking Office, Trump Set Up A Commission Purportedly To Investigate Voter Fraud. The Commission Was Disbanded Less Than A Year Later Without Substantiating Any Wrongdoing, Though The White House Continued To Insist That Fraud Had Occurred.

So Trump's Latest Iteration Of Stolen-Election Claims, In 2020, Was Straight Out Of A Well-Worn Playbook. The Lies Just Became More Extravagant, The Repercussions More

Serious. In May, He Denounced Michigan For Sending Out Absentee Ballots To “7.7 Million People,” Suggesting The State Was Going Down A “Voter Fraud Path!” — Even Though The Secretary Of State Had Merely Sent Out Applications For Ballots, Just As Republican Counterparts In Other States Had Done. Trump Threatened To Withhold Federal Funds To Michigan, And Then Did The Same With Nevada, Claiming It Was Distributing “Illegal Vote By Mail Ballots” And Warning “You Must Not Cheat In Elections.” In Early July, Trump Tweeted That “Mail-In Ballots Will Lead To Massive Electoral Fraud And A Rigged 2020 Election.”

Ultimately, *The Post* Calculated, 84 Percent Of American Voters Were Eligible To Cast Ballots By Mail. Thirty-Four States And The District Of Columbia Allowed Anyone To Vote With An Absentee Ballot. Many States, Aiming To Ensure Access To Voting During A Pandemic, Were Making It Easier By Either Mailing Ballots Or Applications For Ballots To Voters. The Anticipated Surge In Voting By Mail Didn’t Foreshadow An Increase In Fraud — Trump Would Never Prove It Had — But It Did Mean That Counting The Vote Would Take A Lot Longer Than In The Past. Critically, It Also Meant That An Early Lead Reported For Trump On Election Night Could Be Overwhelmed By Mail Ballots That Were Yet To Be Tallied. Due To Their Greater Concerns About COVID, Democrats Appeared More Likely To Vote By Mail, Which Of Course Was The Reason For Trump’s Complaints.

With The Prevalence Of Absentee Ballots, *The Post* Sought To Prepare The Public — In Stories, In Graphics, In Any Way We Could — For How Vote Totals Probably Would Evolve On Election Night. Published Vote Counts Then Were Likely To Be Misleading.

Trump Might Surge Ahead In Early Counts, But The Fall Behind When Mail Ballots Were Included. Recording The Absentee Vote Would Take Longer. National Reporter Amy Gardner, Who Was Working Full-Time On Voting Issues, Noted That The Rise In Mail Balloting And Resulting Slow Vote Tallies In State Elections That Summer Were “A Stark Preview Of What’s Coming On Nov. 3 — Or, More Accurately, What May Not Be Coming: An Election Night Result In The Race For The White House.” Election Officials, She Wrote, Were Cautioning That Results In Battleground States “Could Take Days, Even Weeks, To Resolve.”

Post Readers Were Repeatedly Alerted To How Far Trump Might Go To Retain Power. As Early As July, Reporters Elise Viebeck And Robert Costa Ran Through Possibilities: “Trump Could Claim Victory Before The Vote In Key States Is Fully Counted — A Process That Could Take Days Or Even Weeks This Year Because Of The Expected Avalanche Of Absentee Ballots. He Could Also Spend Weeks Refusing To Concede Amid A Legal War Over Which Are Valid And Should Be Included In The Tally ... Or He Could Simply Refuse To Leave On Jan. 20 — A Possibility Biden Has Discussed Publicly.”

Trump Was No More Willing In September Than He Had Been In The Summer To Commit To A Peaceful Transfer Of Power. “We’re Going To Have To See What Happens,” He Said When Directly Asked At A News Conference. *The Post’s* Dan Balz Wrote Presciently That The President’s Comments Were “Aimed At Rallying His Own Army Of Supporters, Prepping Them To Respond, If Necessary, With Protests Or Perhaps Worse If He Challenges Vote Tabulations — And Therefore Results — In The Days After The Election.”

The Worst Seemed Increasingly Likely. Contributing To That Concern Was Trump's Refusal To Condemn Militant Groups That He Counted Among His Political Base. He Had Condoned, Even Encouraged, Violence Among His Supporters Who Showed Up At His Rallies During The 2016 Presidential Race. And In A 2020 Debate At The End Of September, He Refused To Denounce White Supremacists And Other Heavily Armed Right-Wing Extremists. When Pressed By Moderator Chris Wallace Of Fox News During A Debate With Joe Biden, Trump Responded, "Proud Boys, Stand Back And Stand By." Trump's Comments Sparked Excitement Within The Proud Boys, A Group That Openly Endorsed Violence. Members Called The President's Remarks "Historic," Seeing An Endorsement Of Their Mission And Methods. The Proud Boys Would, In Fact, Stand By Until They Answered Trump's Call To Go To Washington On January 6, 2021, To "Stop The Steal" Of An Election He Lost.

Winks And Nods To Armed Groups Were Part Of Trump's Old Playbook, Too. Exactly A Year Before The September Debate, Trump Outlined The Most Apocalyptic And Violent Scenario For What Might Happen If He Were Removed From Office Through Impeachment, Tweeting A Quote That It Might "Cause A Civil War Like Fracture In This Nation From Which Our Country Will Never Heal." *The Leader Of The Militant Oath Keepers Immediately Followed Up With A Tweet Of His Own: "This Is Where We Are. We ARE On The Verge Of A HOT Civil War. Like In 1859."* Earlier, In March 2019, Trump Suggested In An Interview With *Brietbart* That People Would Play "Tough" On His Behalf If They Reached A Breaking Point. *"I Can Tell You I Have The Support Of The Police, The Support Of The Police, The Support Of Bikers For Trump — I Have The Tough People, But They Don't Play It Tough — Until They Go To A Certain Point, And Then It Would Be*

Very Bad, Very Bad,” He Said. Trump Was Unhesitating In His Approval Of People Who Were “Angry” On His Behalf And Admiring Of Their Capacity To Rough People Up.

By The End Of October, *The Post* Was Sounding The Alarm That The Election Could Lead To Mayhem. Reporter Marc Fisher Wrote, “The Signals Are Disturbing: A Sharp Increase In Gun Sales. A Spike In Chatter About Civil War In Online Forums Where Right-Wing Extremists Gather. An Embrace Of Violent Language By President Trump And Other Leaders. And Surveys Showing An Increased Willingness By Some Americans To See Violence As An Acceptable Tool Against Political Opponents.”

Trump’s Own Words Provided Clear Evidence That The Country Was Most Likely Headed For A Constitutional Crises. Bruising Battles In The Courts Were One Thing, But Signs Also Pointed To Possible Fighting In The Streets. *Axios* Reported, Just Days Before Election Day, That Trump Had Told Confidants He Would Declare Victory On Election Night If The Count Showed Him Ahead, Not Waiting For The Entirely Legitimate Mail-In Ballots To Be Tallied. “We’re Going To Go In The Night Of, As Soon As That Election Is Over, We’re Going In With Our Lawyers,” Trump Told Reporters In Charlotte, North Carolina, On November 1.

One Day Before The Election, A *Post* News Story Advised Readers To Anticipate “A Stretch Of Uncertainty And Chaos As A Purge Of Top Officials, Legal Challenges To Election Results And Potential Resistance To A Normal Transition Cloud The Projects For An Orderly Post-Election Period No Matter Who Wins.” *The Post’s* Journalists Were Ready: For Recounts, For Litigation, And For Violence. Nine Reporters Were Assigned To

Chase Down Any Voting Irregularities After Immersing Themselves In The Laws In Eleven Potentially Decisive States: Wisconsin, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Arizona, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Minnesota, And Nebraska. *Seventy Reporters On Staff And In Our Network Of Freelancers Were Deployed On The Ground In Thirty-Seven States To Cover The Voting But Also “Potential Unrest.”*

As With So Much About Trump, His Behavior On Election Night Was Shocking But Not Surprising. He Attacked The Integrity Of The Elections, Anointing Himself The Winner Even Though All The Votes Had Yet To Be Counted. “This Is A Fraud On The American Public,” Trump Declared Before 150 Supporters At 2:20 A.M. The Morning After The Election From The East Room Of The White House. “We Were Getting Ready To Win This Election. Frankly, We Did Win This Election.”

Dan Balz, A Wise And Careful Analyst Of Politics Throughout His Decades-Long Tenure At The Paper, Wrote An Assessment Of Trump That Was More Blistering Than Anything I’d Ever Seen Him Publish:

Four Four Years, President Trump Has Sought To Undermine The Institutions Of A Democratic Society, But Never So Blatantly As In The Early Morning Hours Of Wednesday. His Attempt To Falsely Claim Victory And To Subvert The Election Itself By Calling For A Halt To Vote-Counting Represents The Gravest Of Threats To The Stability Of The Country ... A President Who Respected The Constitution Would Let Things Play Out. But Trump Has Shown Once Again He Cares Not About The Constitution Or The Stability And Well-Being Of The Country Or Anything Like That. He Cares Only About Himself And Retaining The Powers He Now Holds.

After The Vote Tallies Began To Show A Biden Victory, I Was Inundated With Emails And Voicemails From Trump Supporters Spewing The Hostility He Had Fomented For Years Against *The Post* And The Press Overall. Some Threatened Harm — And A Few Of Those, Research By Our Security Team Showed, Were Sent By People With Criminal Records: *“Your [Sic] Nothing But Democratic Douches And I Curse All You Motherfuckers And Hope You And Your Families Die A Horrible Death. You Just Killed Our Country Ya Ignorant Bastards.” “When The Masses Come For You To Hang You From The Nearest Tree I’ll Tell Your Grandkids You Were A Traitor To The Country That Made You Rich. Should Not Have Worshipped Satan You Freak.” You Son Of A Bitch, Trump Is The Best President This Country Has Or Will Ever See ... We True American Patriots Will Hunt Every One Of You Pieces Of Shit And Exterminate You Lowlife Anti-America Communist Dogs.” “I Pray For Your Tabloid To Burn And Hope President Trump Gives A Coup With The Support Of The Military And Shuts Up You And All The Fake News Poison Up.”*

More Astonishing To Me Than The Threats Was An Email I Received From The Former Top Official Of A Major Public Agency In Massachusetts Whom I Had Gotten To Know When I Was Leading The Newsroom Of *The Boston Globe*. He Had Gone On To Become Chief Executive Of Two Sizable Companies. We Had Stayed In Touch Over The Years, Occasionally Meeting For Lunch In Washington, DC, And I Knew He Leaned Conservative. After All Major Networks, Including Fox News, On November 7 Called The Presidential Election For Joe Biden, I Received An Email Expressing Indignation:

“I’ve Re-Read 1984. Who In The Media Or The Democrat Party Is Now Big Brother Or In Charge Of The Ministry?” He Wrote. “Where Do I Turn Myself In To The Thought Police

To Be Re-Educated? Fox News Has Been Brought Into Line So Now The Media Call Elections And Are In Total Control Of All Truth. No Differences Of Opinion Are Tolerated ... Gore Took 32 Days To Concede After The Supreme Court Rule. The First Amendment Is Now Irrelevant Under The Current Stream Of Political Correctness. Who's Going To Bring Us Together? The Hypocrisy, The Arrogance, And The Hubris Is Breathtaking." He Signed It, "Your Despicable, Deplorable Friend."

I Was Stunned At The Vitriol From Someone Who Had Always Been So Amiable. He Had Been An Honorable, Effective Public Servant In A State That Was No Stranger To Government Corruption, Cronyism, And Incompetence. I Considered Him A Good Person And Still Do. But It Was Unsettling Firsthand Evidence That Trump's Latest And Most Despicable Acts Of Guile Had Cast A Dark Spell On Even The Most Traditional Republicans. Offended That He Would Associate Me With Hillary Clinton's Obnoxiously Dismissive "Basket Of Deplorables" Comment In 2016, I Told Him, "I'd Really Appreciate It If You Didn't Impute To Me, Even Sarcastically, Beliefs That I Don't Hold. I Was Particularly Appalled That He Would Equate Trump's Voter Fraud Claims With The Disputed Race Between George W Bush And Al Gore In 2000. I Had Been Editor Of The *Miami Herald* During That Election, And There Was A Yawning Difference Between 2000 And 2020. Gore Had Merely Requested A Recount, Following The Ordinary Legal Process And Never Alleging Fraud. Whoever Won Florida Would Win The Election, And Gore Was Said To Have Lost The State Of Florida By A Mere 537 Votes. When The U.S. Supreme Court Halted A Recount, Gore Graciously Conceded: *This Is America, And We Put Country Before Party; We Will Stand Together Behind Our New President.*

In The *Miami Herald* Newsroom, That 2000 Ruling By The Supreme Court In *Bush v Gore* Gave Us Cause And Inspiration To Do More Work. The Public Was Entitled To Know Who Really Won The Presidency. And We Had A Way Of Finding Out. Florida's Expansive Public Records Laws Permitted Us To Examine Every Ballot Cast. So We Embarked On A Recount Of Our Own, Also Hiring A Major Accounting Firm To Inspect The Ballots Independently In All Sixty-Seven Florida Counties, Running Up About \$1 Million In Total Costs. The *Herald* Reporters And The Accounting Firm Came To The Same Conclusion: ***Bush Most Likely Would Have Still Won If The Supreme Court Had Not Denied The Recount.***

Twenty Years Later, At *The Washington Post*, We Were Again Laser-Focused On The Evidence In A Disputed Election. Having Monitored The Election Closely With Staff Around The Country, We Had Seen No Evidence Of Significant Fraud. Now We Were Waiting To See If Donald Trump And His Legal Team Could Produce Any. They Didn't. The Election Had Not Been Rigged, But Trump Was Now Trying Himself To Rig The Outcome.

A Bit More Than A Week After The Election, Reporters David Fahrenthold, Rosalind Helderman, And Tom Hamburger Showed Just How Flimsy Trump's Claims Were. Examining The Affidavits Of Republican Poll Watchers, They Found Anything But The "Shocking" Misconduct That Trump Had Promised The American Public, Despite Republican's Offers Of Cash Rewards For Evidence Of Fraud. In Michigan, Where Biden Led By 154,000 Votes And Trump Asked A Federal Judge To Block The State From Certifying The Election, The President's Lawyers Promised 230 Pages Of Sworn

Statements From A Hundred People Who Observed Ballot-Counting Problems. What They Delivered Was Inconsequential. One Complained, For Example, About The Public Address System; Another That A Poll Worker Was Wearing That Military Ballots Weren't Trending Republican As He Expected.

The Post Dug Aggressively Into The Pressures That Republicans Put On Georgia Secretary Of State Brad Raffensperger, Including By Senator Lindsey Graham, Whom Raffensperger Accused Of Proposing Ways To Throw Out Legally Cast Ballots. (Graham Denied That.)

No One Brought Greater Pressure, Though, Than Trump Himself. *The Post's* Amy Gardner Delivered One Of The Most Explosive Stories Of The Post-Election Period When She Revealed That Raffensperger Had Received A Call From The President Urging Him To "Find" Enough Votes To Reverse Biden's Narrow Victory In Georgia. "So Look," Trump Told Raffensperger, According To A Recording Of The Phone Call That Amy Obtained. "All I Want To Do Is This. I Just Want To Find 1,780 Votes, Which Is One More Than We Have. Because We Won The State." And Trump, As The Recording Showed, Threatened Raffensperger And His General Counsel With Potential Criminality If They Didn't Bend To His Will. Fulton County's District Attorney Later Opened An Investigation Into Whether Trump Illegally Interfered In The Election, With Trump's Phone Call To Raffensperger At The Heart Of The Case. The Investigation Was Ongoing As This Was Written.

We Owed It To The Public Not To Mince Words About What Trump Had Inflicted On The Country. "The Result Was An Election Aftermath Without Precedent In U.S. History," *Post* Reporters Wrote In A Story Titled "20 Days Of Fantasy And Failure" That

Reconstructed The Three Weeks Since Election Day. “With His Denial Of The Outcome, Despite A String Of Courtroom Defeats, Trump Endangered America’s Democracy, Threatened To Undermine National Security And Public Health, And Duped Millions Of His Supporters Into Believing, Perhaps Permanently, That Biden Was Elected Illegitimately.” Reporting By Our Political Correspondents Found A President Who, In The Weeks Since The Election, *Was “Brooding,” “Rageful,” And “At Times Delirious.”*

The Post Outlined For The Public In Mid-December How *At Least Eighty-Six Judges At Every* Level, Even Those Trump Himself Appointed, Repudiated The President’s Fraud Claims And His Plea To Throw Out Millions Of Legally Cast Votes. The U.S. Supreme Court, Where Trump’s Appointments Had Cemented A 6-3 Conservative Majority, Dismissed A Lawsuit By Texas Seeking To Overturn Election Results In Four Other States. “The Supreme Court Really Let Us Down. No Wisdom, No Courage!” Trump Tweeted. Overall At That Point, Trump And His Allies Had Lost More Than Fifty Lawsuits, Winning Only One On A Minor Matter.” “Free, Fair Elections Are The Lifeblood Of Democracy. Charges Of Unfairness Are Serious. But Calling An Election Unfair Does Not Make It So,” Wrote Federal Appeals Court Judge Stephanos Bibas, Who Was Appointed By Trump, In Rejecting His Attempt To Throw Out Pennsylvania’s Votes For Biden. “Charges Require Specific Allegations And Then Proof. We Have Neither Here.”

Polls Showed That Trump Supporters Weren’t Taking Their Cue From The Courts Any More Than They Were From The Press. They Got Their “Facts” Only From Trump And Media That Parroted His Falsehoods. A Fox News Poll That December Showed That 68 Percent Of Republicans Believed The Election Was Stolen While 77 Of Trump Voters

Believed That. Thirty-Six Percent Of Americans Believed That Biden Was Not Legitimately Elected As President. The Numbers Barely Budged Over Time. And By The Fall Of 2022, *The Post* Calculated, A Majority Of Republican Nominees For House, Senate, And Key Statewide Offices Either Outright Rejected The Legitimacy Of The 2020 Election Or Questioned The Results.

Perhaps Trump's True Believers Could Never Be Persuaded Of Anything Other Than What He Told Them, Particularly When The Media He Demonized Was The Source. But Our Job Was To Provide Verifiable Facts. The Democracy We Had All Taken For Granted Was At Risk, Sabotaged By The President Himself. Sharp Political Differences Were A Feature Of Our System. But How Could Democracy Survive If Americans Couldn't Agree On The Most Basic Facts — Couldn't Agree On How To Establish Something As Fact, Even When It Came To An Election?

I Asked Our Staff In December 2020 To Assemble All Allegations Of Election Misconduct Leveled By Trump And His Allies And Explain How They Had Been Addressed By The Courts, Election Officials, And Federal Agencies. *The Post* Systematically Went Through Every Issue, Posting On Its Website Key Documents So Readers Could View Them For Themselves: Was Voting Software From Dominion Voting Systems' Machines Compromised, As Trump Supporters Claimed? "There Is No Evidence That Any Voting Systems Were Compromised, According To The Cybersecurity And Infrastructure Security Agency." Has The Federal Government Investigated Or Found Any Evidence Of Voting Fraud? "Attorney General William P Barr Said On Dec 1 That FBI Agents And U.S. Attorney's Have Been Investigating Complaints But 'To Date, We Have Not Seen Fraud

On A Scale That Could have Affected A Different Outcome In The Election.’” Did Election Officials Manipulate Signature-Verification Machinery In Clark County, Nevada? “After A Nine-Hour Evidentiary Hearing That Focused In Large Part On The Signature-Verification Machine, A Carson City Judge Found No Evidence That The Use Of The So-Called Agilis Machine Was Illegal, Error-Prone Or Had Led To The Counting Of Fraudulent Votes.” And On The Story Went, Through One Allegation After The Next, First The Trump Claim And Then Reality.

It Was Telling That After Onetime Trump Attorney Sidney Powell Was Sued For Defamation By Dominion Voting Systems Over Her Emphatic Claims That Its Election Equipment Was Deployed In A Conspiracy To Rig The Election, Her Defense In March 2021 Was That *“No Reasonable Person Would Conclude That The Statements Were Truly Statements Of Fact.”*

Trump, In A Tweet On December 19, Summoned His Supporters To A Rally In The Nation’s Capital On January 6, 2021: *“Big Protest In DC On January 6th. Be There, Will Be Wild!”* Armed Extremist Groups, Other Thugs, And Hundreds Of Enraged Trump Followers Immediately Understood It As A Battle Cry, Undoubtedly As He Intended. “We Are Going To Only Be Saved By Millions Of Americans Moving To Washington, Occupying The Entire Area, If Necessary, Storming Right Into The Capitol,” One Right-Wing Commentator Said In A Video That

Was Promptly Posted.

Covering Trump And His Followers That Day, Along With Possible Counterprotestors, Would Require Special Precautions: *Post* Editors Reminded Staff Of Security Best Practices. Kevlar Bulletproof Vests, Helmets, And Goggles Were Made Available. *The Post's* Security Team Positioned Additional Personnel At Headquarters, And A Reconnaissance Vehicle Was Situated As Close To The Trump Protests As Possible To Extract Staff If Necessary.

This Is What Trump Had Wrought. The Press Was Now Required To Physically Protect Itself From Fellow American Citizens Inflamed By The President Of The United States. Trump's Unrelenting Rhetoric Condemning The Press As They Enemy Had Made This Moment Inevitable. Time And Again The President Had Been Warned That His Incendiary Language Could Get People Hurt. He Didn't Let Up. He Doubled Down. So What If It Led To Tragedy.

Local Editor Mike Semel's Memo For Deploying His Reporters To Five

Different Rallies On January 6 Emphasized That Their Own Eyewitness Observations Of Violence Would Ensure The Greatest Accuracy. “Ideally, We Won’t Have To Rely On He Said / He Said Accounts, Police Reports Or Snippets Of Video. We Would Like To Be Able To Say Definitively What Happened.” And Yet Reporters Would Have To Do That Without Endangering Themselves. “Don’t Put Yourself In Harm’s Way,” Mike Cautioned. “No Story Is Worth Your Health, Safety And Piece Of Mind.”

Mike Advised His Staff That Chatter On Right-Leaning Social Media Sites Popular With Trump Supporters Suggested Protests Could Become Something Far Worse: “Proud Boys Will Be In Town. We Do Not Know What Their Numbers Will Be. Wednesday Has The Added Element Of Finality. If You Believe Posts On Parler, There Are People Coming To Make The Last Stand. They Are Coming Armed.”

Violence Against An Independent Press That Had Been Foreseen For So Long Erupted In Front Of The Capitol. A Large Crowd Descended On A Media Staging Area Set Up Outside The Northeast Corner Of The Capitol Grounds, Forcing Journalists To Flee. Rioters Cursed At, Spat At, And

Shoved Reporters, Photographers, And Videographers, Including Many Of *The Post's*. An Illinois Man Picked Up Media Equipment And Tossed It, Then Tackled A Cameraman. A Massachusetts Man Who Claimed To Be A Documentarian Was Recorded Stomping On Equipment. A Virginia Man, Later Arrested, Boasted To A Friend, "We Attacked The CNN Reporters And The Fake News And Destroyed Tens Of Thousands Of Dollars Of Their Video And Television Equipment; Here's A Picture Behind Me Of The Pile We Made Out Of It." CNN Was A Particular Focus Of Harassment And Attack. "CNN Sucks!" They Shouted. "Fuck CNN!"

A Group Of Men Had Broken Through Police Lines To Storm Into The Capitol Approached A Photographer In The Building Demanding To Know Whom She Worked For. When She Declined To Answer, They Reached Into Her Vest And Grabbed Her Press Credentials. Discovering That She Was A *New York Times* Photographer, They Threw Her To The Floor And Snatched Her Camera. When She Stood Up And Sought To Recover Her Equipment, They Pushed Her Away. "Get Her Out, Mace Her," Yelled One Rioter Who Was Later Arrested. Outside The Capitol,

An Associated Press Photographer, Accused Of Being A Member Of The Left-Wing “Antifa” Movement Despite His Visible Press Pass, Was Grabbed By His Backpack, Pulled Down A Flight Of Stairs, And Tossed Over A Ledge As Someone Screamed, *“We’ll Fucking Kill You.”*

Amanda Andrade-Rhoades, A Freelance Photographer On Assignment For *The Washington Post*, Reported That Three Individuals Threatened To Shoot Her, Although She Didn’t See Whether They Were Armed. One Leaned Over And Warned Her, *“I’m Coming Back With A Gun Tomorrow, And I’m Coming For You.”* *Post* Videojournalist Kate Woodsome Was Surrounded By About Ten Rioters At The Capitol Steps, Shortly After The Shooting Inside Of Thirty-Five-Year-Old Intruder Ashli Babbitt By A Twenty-Eight-Year Veteran Of The Capitol Police. When Asked To Disclose Her Affiliation, She Said She Worked For *The Post*. “Yeah, Get The Fuck Out Of Here,” One Shouted At Her. “All The Lies You’ve Told All This Time, That’s What Made This Happen.” She Stayed Calm, Stayed Put, And Continued To Do Her Job, Just Like Other *Post* Journalists That Day.

Though *Post* Editors Had Foreseen Possible Violence, We Were As Stunned And Horrified As Anyone When Trump Loyalists Launched A Vicious, Hate-Filled Assault On The Seat Of American Democracy, Breaching Security Barriers, Pummeling Capitol Police, And Sending Members Of Congress — And Vice President Pence — Fleeing For Their Lives. Over Decades As An Editor, I Had Stayed Unemotional, If Not Clinical, In Overseeing Coverage Of Heart-Wrenching Stories, From The Slaughtering Of Innocents In An Epidemic Of Mass Shootings To The Human Devastation Of Natural Disasters. Like Cops, I Thought, Journalists Need Emotional Armor To Do Our Jobs, And I Was Inherently Stoic Anyway.

There Were Occasional Exceptions When I Was Personally Shaken By News Events. One Was 9/11, When Thousands Were Killed In A Barbarous Attack And The United States Felt Alarmingly Vulnerable. Another Was May 9, 2003, When I Learned That A Brilliant And Courageous *Boston Globe* Reporter, Elizabeth Neuffer, Was Killed In An Auto Accident While Covering The Aftermath Of War In Iraq. I Called The *Globe* Newsroom Together To Announce That We Had Lost A Beloved

Colleague. With So Many Reporters In Conflict Zones, I Prayed Ever Since That I Never Had To Make Such An Announcement Again. On January 6, 2021, Emotions Surged Once More.

One Bitter, Deceitful, And Self-Absorbed Man, Born To Great Privilege And Yet Always Playing The Victim, Had Put America's Entire Constitutional System At Death's Door For The Sole Purpose Of Holding On To Power That Voters No Longer Wished To Grant Him. I Felt Rage And Sadness, And I Feared What The Insurrection Foreshadowed For The Country's Future.

Video Journalist Rhonda Colvin Was In The Capitol Was In The Capitol Rotunda For *The Post's* Scheduled Live Show Of The Joint Session Of Congress Where Vice President Was To Count Electoral Votes And Confirm The Result Of The Presidential Election. Behind Her, A Capitol Police Officer Was Barking, "Evacuate Now! Evacuate Now!" She And Videographer Lindsey Sitz Were Directed Down Three Flights Of Stairs To The Capitol Basement. "We Were Told To Just Keep Moving, Keep

Moving,” She Recounted On A *Post* Video Two Days Later. From An Officer’s Radio, She Could Hear Shots Fired.

Rhonda Watched Video Of The Mob Storming The Capitol, Viciously Attacking Police. “You’re Not Sure How Far These People Will Be Able To Get, And If They’ll Be Able To Get You,” Rhonda Recalled With Remarkable Understatement. “There Is A Fear Of What Would Have Happened If I Alone Would Have Been Walking In Those Hallways And Run Into These Men Who, We Know, Many Of Them Are From Nationalist Groups And The Proud Boys And White Supremacists. I Mean, I Would Have Stuck Out Like A Sore Thumb ... Seeing Me Wearing A *Washington Post* Badge — And I’m Black — That Could Bring Some Attention That I Don’t Want.” Rioters Were Not At All Subtle About Their Hatred: “*Murder The Media*” Was Etched On A Door Inside The Capitol.

Ultimately, After The Lockdown Was Lifted, Rhonda And Lindsey Were Picked Up By Two *Post* Security Personnel In A Reconnaissance Van At The Longworth House Office Building, Adjacent To The Capitol Grounds, Delayed Only By Reports Of An Explosive On Their Route. During The

Attack On The Capitol, As Rhonda And Lindsey Sought Safety, They Kept Reporting And Maintained Contact With The Live Show's Anchor, Libby Casey. "President Trump Is Staying Silent On This. He's Not Calling For People To Stand Down," Libby Said, Momentarily Breaking Down Emotionally Over The Danger Faced By Her Colleague. "I'm Sorry," She Continued. "Rhonda, Talk About The Role The President's Playing Right Now."

Remaining Composed, Rhonda Articulated What The Rioters, Members Of Congress, Journalists, And The American Public Were All Thinking. "Ugh, Well, The Fact That He Is Being Silent And Not Decrying The Activities That Are Happening In The U.S. Capitol Right Now, That Sort Of Speaks Volumes." It Sure Did. He Approved. These Were His People. They Were Fighting For Him. *They Were Doing What He Wanted Them To Do.*

At 12:17 PM, In His Speech At The Rally Near The White House, Trump Told Protestors They Should March Toward The Capitol — "And I'll Be There With You — Because "You'll Never Take Back Our Country With

Weakness.” Shortly Before 1:00 PM, As The Joint Session Of Congress Was Convened, A Mob Overwhelmed Police Barricades Around The Capitol. At 1:02 PM, Vice President Issued A Statement That He Wouldn’t Stop The Counting Of Electoral Ballots As Trump Had Insisted. At 1:10 PM, Concluding His Speech And Again Directing The Crowd To Head To The Capitol, Trump Said, *“And We Fight. We Fight Like Hell. And If You Don’t Fight Like Hell, You’re Not Going To Have A Country Anymore.”* *Trump Used The Word “Fight” Twenty Times In His Remarks.*

At 2:12 PM, Rioters Burst Into The Capitol. The Senate Was Called Into Recess; Then The House. At 2:13 PM, Security Agents Evacuated The Vice President From The Senate Chamber. At About 2:15 PM The Mob Outside The Capitol Began Chanting “Hang Mike Pence.” At 2:24 PM, Trump Tweeted, “Mike Pence Didn’t Have The Courage To Do What Should Have Been Done To *Protect Our Country And Our Constitution.*” It Was Not Until 4:17 PM That Trump Called Upon The Insurrectionist Mob To Leave The Capitol With The Words...

“We Love You. You’re Very Special.” At 6:00 PM, He Tweeted,
“These Are The Things That Happen When A Sacred
Landslide Victory Is So Unceremoniously And Viciously
Stripped Away From Great Patriots Who Have Been
Badly & Unfairly Treated For So Long ... Remember This
Day Forever!”

The Rampage Didn’t Happen On Its Own. Trump Made It Happen —
And, Untroubled, Let It Continue For Hours — After Plotting Desperately
But Unsuccessfully To Get States And The Vice President To Overturn A
Fair Election. Additional Reporting Over Time Would Reveal The
Extreme, Lawless Measures He Took To Defy The Will Of The Voters. The
House’s Select Committee To Investigate The January 6 Attack Would In
2022 Deliver A Mountain Of Testimony And Documentary Evidence That,
To Any Observer Interested In The Facts, *Should Serve As Overwhelming
Proof Of His Culpability.*

As The Riot At The Capitol Was Unfolding, *Post* Journalists Had Some Instant Decisions To Make About The Language We Would Use To Describe What Happened On January 6. What To Call The People Who Attacked The Capitol? *“Mob,”* I Decided. Should We Say The President Incited Them? *Yes. It Was Clear From His Words That He Had.* *The Post’s* Story Was Blunt In Its Account Of What Happened That Afternoon. It Was *“An Attempted Coup”* By A *“Mob”* That Was *“Incited”* By The President Who Told His Supporters That They *“Should Never Accept Defeat.”* Police Were Overrun In A *“Monumental Security Failure.”* And Within The Week *Post* Journalists Had Investigated Trump’s Sickening Inaction While Police Were Attacked, The Capitol Was Ransacked, Members Of Congress And The Vice President Were Hunted, Journalists Were Assaulted, And The Democratic Process Came Frighteningly Close To Being Demolished.

And What Was Trump Doing While All This Happened? *The Post’s* Journalists Reported That, After He Returned To The White House, Trump Watched The Violence Escalate On Live TV. *“Even As He Did So,”* *The Post* Revealed On January 11, As Part Of Its Determined Yearlong

Coverage That Ended Up Earning A Pulitzer Prize For Public Service, “Trump Did Not Move To Act. And The Message From Those Around Him — That He Needed To Call Off The Angry Mob He Had Egged On Just Hours Earlier, Or Lives Could Be Lost — Was One To Which He Was Not Initially Receptive.” It Was A Portrait Of A President Who Had “Failed To Perform Even The Basic Duties Of His Job.” White House Reporters Ashley Parker, Josh Dawsey, And Philip Rucker Wrote, “The Man Who Vowed To Be A President Of Law And Order Failed To Enforce The Law Or Restore Order. The Man Who Has Always Seen Himself As The Protector Of Uniformed Police Sat Idly By As Capitol Police Were Outnumbered, Outmaneuvered, Trampled On — And In One Case, Killed. And The Man Who Had Long Craved The Power Of The Presidency Abdicated Many Of The Responsibilities Of The Commander Of Chief.” In 2022, Hearings Held By The House Committee Investigating January 6 Would Confirm Every Word Of Their Account.

One Week After The Attack, Trump Was Impeached, For A Second Time, With A 232-197 Vote Of The House Of Representatives. The Resolution, Charging “Incitement Of Insurrection,” Declared That Trump Had

“Gravely Endangered The Security Of The United States And Its Institutions Of Government. He Threatened The Integrity Of The Democratic System, Interfered With The Peaceful Transition Of Power, And Imperiled A Coequal Branch Of Government.” *Only Ten House Republicans Supported Impeachment.* On February 13, With The Inauguration Of Joe Biden Now History And The Former President Resettled Into His Lavish Mar-a-Lago Resort In Palm Beach, Florida, Trump Was Acquitted By The Senate. Two-Thirds Of The Senators Were Required To Convict. But The Vote Fell Short, With Fifty-Seven Voting In Favor And Forty-Three Against. *Only Seven Republican Senators Voted To Find Trump Guilty.*

Trump Was Rescued By A Republican Party That Brought Under His Complete Control.

*“Real Power Is — I Don’t Want Even Want To Use The Word — **Fear,**”* Trump Had Famously Told Bob Woodward And Robert Costa Of *The Washington Post* In Early April 2016 When He Still Battling For His Party’s Nomination. Trump Could Not Have Been More Satisfied Now, Years Later, To Have Been Proved So Right. Fear Of Trump’s Retribution Predetermined How Nearly All Republicans In Congress

Would Vote On Impeachment. Political Careers Would Be In Jeopardy If They Withheld Their Support. Even Those Who Had Immediately Denounced Trump As Responsible For

The January 6 Lacked The Spine Or Integrity To Hold Him To Account. Trump “Bears Responsibility For Wednesday’s Attack On Congress By Mob Rioters,” Said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, Who Went On To Vote Against Impeachment And Later Assign Blame Instead To House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Trump Was “Practically And Morally Responsible For Provoking The Events Of The Day,” In The Words Of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, *Although He Had Just Voted Against Conviction.*

In Short Order Republicans Resorted To What Had Routinely Proved So Easy, Useful, And Effective For Trump Himself: *Deny Objective Reality. Invent Conspiracies. Offer Up Phony “Alternative Facts.” Just As Trump Had Lied About The Election, They Lied About The Election Aftermath: The Attackers Were Really Antifa Members Disguised As Trump Supporters. The “Deep State” FBI Had Orchestrated The Attack. The Intruders Carried Themselves As If They Were On A “Normal Tourist Visit.” The Events That Day Were “Nothing,” Just “Patriots Standing Up.” The Rioters Arrested Were “Political Prisoners Of War.”* The Republican National Committee In February 2022 Put The Party’s Official Stamp On All The Dishonesty When It Described The Attack And The Events Leading To It As “Legitimate Political Discourse.”

Trump Had The Republican Party In His Grip And Doing His Bidding. If He Lied, They Would Lie, Too. If He Invented Conspiracies, They Would Treat Them As Truth, Adding Conspiracies Of Their Own Wild Imaginations. Trump’s Behavior Became Theirs. *Whatever His Wrongdoing, They Would Find Words And Means To Excuse It.*

Voters, However, Get To Exercise Their Independence. They Had Chosen To Evict Him From The White House Based On What They Had Learned About All He Had Done With The Power Of His Office And Who He Was As A Human Being. Trump's Conviction That He Could Retain The Presidency With A Minority Of Voters — Just 47 Percent, As He Boasted When *The Post's* Owner, Publisher, Editorial Page Editor, And I Had Dined With Him At The White House In 2017 — Proved Misplaced: Key States Had Shifted Against Him, Denying Him The Electoral College Victory That Was His In 2016.

A Reality-Based Press Had Resisted Trump's Ugly Bullying And His Followers' Violent Threats To Give American Citizens The Information They Were Entitled To Know. Unlike Weak-Kneed Politicians Among The GOP, Self-Respecting Journalists Don't Buckle Easily And Cravenly. That's The Value Of A Free And Strong Press. *It Should Be Cause For Americans To Reflect On How Democracy Would Crumble If This Country Ever Loses Its Independent Media.*

Journalism Rooted In Facts Clearly Had Suffered An Accelerating Loss Of Trust And Influence During The Trump Years. *Trump Counted That As One Of His Greatest Achievements.* His Ritual Denunciations Of "Fake News" And "Enemy Of The People" Had Delivered Results. He Wanted Us Perceived As The "Opposition Party," And Among Tens Of Millions Of Trump Supporters We Were. But His Ploy Hadn't Worked As Well As He'd Wished. Authentic Journalism Had Not Lost All Its Impact. Facts Still Mattered — In Elections, In The Courts, And Even (Somewhat) In A Polarized Congress. Maybe, I Reasoned, The Country Was Less Immune To Truth Than I Had Feared. It Appeared, As

I'd Hoped And Believed, That Most Americans Were Independent-Minded, Respectful Of Facts, And Concerned For The Future Of Our Democracy.

I Wasn't Being Pollyannaish. There Was Ample Cause For Worry. On The Eve Of Joe Biden's Inauguration As The Nation's Forty-Sixth President, A *Washington Post* Poll Showed That Seven In Ten Republicans Still Believed He Was Not Legitimately Elected. But There Was Also Reason To Reject Despair: Overall, Among Americans, Six In Ten Believed Biden Was Legitimately Elected. Independents Believed That By The Same Margin. And An NBC News Poll As Of October 2022 Showed That Independents' Belief In The Election's Legitimacy Had Risen Since January 2021 To 74 Percent From 62 Percent.

It Remains Alarming That So Many Americans Still Believe The 2020 Election Was Stolen. By Contrast, When George W Bush Was Inaugurated As President In 2001, Eight Of Ten Americans Accepted The Legitimacy Of His Presidency Despite The Sharply Contested Outcome Of The 2000 Presidential Election. Stubborn Denial Of Results For A Presidential Election Twenty Years Later Is *A Warning Of Possibly Even Greater Danger Ahead*. And Yet For Now, Facts Can Claim A Victory: Despite Trump Never Letting Up On His Bogus Fraud Claims, Most Americans Are Convinced He Truly Lost.

Getting The Facts, Publishing Them Forthrightly, And Defying Intimidation Still Proved A Powerful Formula. I Was Satisfied That Our Journalism Had Made A Positive Difference. History, I Was Certain, Would Judge It Well. My Colleagues In Newsroom Needed To Know That.

“This News Staff,” I Wrote In Announcing My Imminent Retirement, “Has Delivered The Finest Journalism, Shedding Light Where It Was Much Needed And Holding To Account The Powerful, Especially Those Entrusted To Govern This Country ... You Stood Up Time And Again Against Vilification And Vile Threats. You Stood Firm Against Cynical, Never-Ending Assaults On Objective Fact.”

Fifty-Three Days After The January 6 Assault On The Capitol, As I Removed The Last Of My Possessions From A Newsroom That The Pandemic Had Emptied Out, I Felt Confident That A Reinvigorated *Washington Post* Had Fulfilled Its Duty To The American People And A Fragile Democracy. A President Had Waged War Against Us, But We Kept At Our Work. Never Had The Work Been More Urgent.

The Post Had Grown And Strengthened Under A New Owner Who Remained Firmly Committed To Its Mission In A Democracy, Even As He Was Relentlessly Attacked And His Other Business Interests Threatened. Its Journalistic Resources Had Nearly Doubled Since His Acquisition In 2013. *The Post's* Capacity To Gather Information And Keep A Watchful Eye On Those Who Run And Influence Our Government Is Today Greater Than At Any Time In Its History.

The Post Can Continue That Work Because Of The *Freedoms Granted The Press Under The Constitution*. This Democracy Of Ours Rightly Demands Much From The Press As Well.

We Are Called Upon To Dig For The Truth Fearlessly And Share What We Learn Clearly,
Completely, Honestly, And Directly.

*What Happens After That Depends On What The
American People Do With The Facts Available To Them.
The Fate Of The Country And Its Democracy
Rests Overwhelmingly In Their Hands.*

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[Ed. Note: I Came Into This World On Friday 17 February 1956 AD At 0532 Hours EST, Screaming And Cussing, As Legend Has It. To Wit, “WTF !!! Is Somebody Gonna Wipe This Amniotic Fluid Off Me And Get Me Wrapped In A *Cashmere* Baby Blanket. And Feel Free To Take Your Time As It’s Only Cold As Hell In Here. Jesus H!” And *Here*, Was, What Was At That Time, A Special Health Care Facility In Washington, DC — Columbia Hospital For Women (CHW). CHW Had A Long And Distinguished History During Its Existence, Which Ran from 1866 Until Its Closure In 2002. CHW Was Situated At 2425 L St, NW Here In The District of Columbia. This Venerated Site Is Now Occupied By A Trader Joe’s At Street Level And A Ritz-Carlton Residential Tower. What? Who The Pfuck Are You? Does The Ritz-Carlton Accept Section 8 Vouchers? I Rightly Reckon I Don’t Know, But I Kinda Doubt It. That Said, Might Not Hurt To Check With ‘Em. What Now? Can You Use My Name? Are You One Of These Faaar-Right, Trump-Sniffing, Evangelical CONTROL FREAKS? You Might Be Better-Served To Reference Your All-Knowing And Allegedly *Benevolent* GOD And/Or THE DONALD. Now, GetOuttaHere!