



It's Even Worse Than You Think: What the Trump Administration is Doing to America

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The Trump administration is remaking the government. *It's Even Worse Than You Think: What the Trump Administration Is Doing to America* tells readers exactly how it is making America worse again.

Bestselling author and longtime Trump observer David Cay Johnston shines a light on the political termites who have infested our government under the Trump Administration, destroying it from within and compromising our jobs, safety, finances, and more.

No journalist knows Donald Trump better than David Cay Johnston, who has been following him since 1988. *It's Even Worse Than You Think: What the Trump Administration Is Doing to America* goes inside the administration to show how the federal agencies that touch the lives of all Americans are being undermined. Here is just some of what you will learn:

The Wall. Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto told President Trump that Mexico will never pay for the border wall. So, Trump is proposing putting a tariff on Mexican imports. But a tariff will simply raise the price of Mexican goods in the US, meaning American consumers will end up paying for the wall—if it ever gets built.

Climate Change. Welcome to the new EPA, run by Scott Pruitt, a lawyer who has spent much of his career trying to destroy the agency he now heads. Secrecy reigns at the new EPA because Pruitt meets with industry executives to find out which clean air and clean water provisions they most want to roll back, and keeps staffers in the dark to make sure these pro-pollution plans don't leak prematurely.

Stocking the Swamp. Contrary to his promise to “drain the swamp” in Washington, DC, Trump has filled his cabinet with millionaires and billionaires, from Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, a Goldman Sachs and hedge fund veteran who made much of his fortune foreclosing on homeowners to billionaire heiress Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who has already put the interests of bankers ahead of debt-burdened students and their families.

The Kleptocracy. Under Donald Trump conflict of interest is passé. When Trump isn't in Washington, he stays at one of his properties, where the taxpayers pick up the tab for staffers, Secret Service, and so on, all at full price. And back in Washington, everyone now knows that the Trump International Hotel is the only place to stay if you want to do business with the administration. Meanwhile sons Donald Jr. and Eric run an eyes-wide-open blind trust of Trump holdings to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest—but not the reality.

It's Even Worse Than You Think: What the Trump Administration is Doing to America Details

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From Reader Review It's Even Worse Than You Think: What the Trump Administration is Doing to America for online ebook

Melki says

This seems to be the book we *should* be reading instead of *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*.

Bill Kerwin says

David Cay Johnston, a Pulitzer-winning journalist specializing in economics and taxes, dives deep into the weeds in this sequel to his bestseller *The Making of Donald Trump*, and reveals how the Trump administration—issue by issue, government department by government department—is dismantling government as we know it. Unfortunately, though, he dives too deep in the weeds for me.

I'm sure this is partially my fault. Johnston has a fine head for numbers, a gift I do not share, and, although he explains himself clearly, I find his occasional trips through The Donald in Mathmagic Land to be both exhaustive and exhausting. Left-brainers, though, will probably enjoy these parts more than I do. Besides, economics is what Johnston does best, and his chapters on taxes and tariffs are illuminating, arguably some of the best in the book.

But the problem with the book is greater than this. Although Johnston's subjects are well chosen, and his points well argued, he often includes too much material, either by presenting unnecessary background, belaboring an obvious point, or discoursing on a tangential matter better dealt with in a footnote. I read every page of Johnston's book, but by the time I was halfway through, I was intermittently skimming.

Nonetheless, *It's Even Worse Than You Think* is a conscientious and reliable piece of journalism which demonstrates that what I most fear is indeed true: beyond the daily buffooneries and brutalities of our chief executive, below the surface events and out of sight, our government agencies are being neutered, underfunded, the very mechanisms of governance halted, our national wealth gleefully ceded to the richest few.

I will conclude with two representative passages. (Each of which shows what David Cay Johnston can do well when he gets "deep in the weeds".) The first passage presents a small eloquent example of the sort of thing a good government grants do well, the kind of thing increasingly impossible in Trump's America:

The American Association of the Advancement of Science gives an annual Golden Goose Award to encourage public understanding of basic research and how it can have big economic benefits. The 2016 Award honored scientists who spend years studying the sexual activity of the screwworm fly. Now, there's an easy area of science for know-nothing politicians and pundits to mock, and many did. The research results got a lot less attention. The scientists learned how to eradicate the pests, which can otherwise kill an otherwise healthy cow in two weeks. Today the price of beef is about 5 percent lower than if the little parasites were still infesting the cattle herds.

The second passage has to do with the true meaning of Donald Trump's phrase "drain the swamp". It is an insight of Joel Clement, a former senior policy analyst at the Department of the Interior, once responsible for dealing with climate change and Native American displacement near the North Bering Sea. Trump issued an

executive order cutting his budget to zero, and Clement soon found himself reassigned, disbursing oil and gas royalty checks for federal and tribal lands.

Clement says he and others misunderstood what Trump meant when he spoke of draining the swamp in Washington. "When they were talking about draining the swamp in Washington, we thought they were talking about lobbyists, but they meant civil servants . . . the civil servants were the swamp.

"When your entire workforce is described as the swamp, morale is done," he said. "People are walking around feeling devalued, targeted, like a group of people with Stockholm Syndrome. Trump's cabinet and high-level office nominations demonstrate the desire to tear down the executive branch. They are making it impossible to implement the laws of Congress. They'll be swimming in litigation. They won't get much else done. They have tossed every guideline from ethics to personnel management.

"When," Clement asked, "will they be held accountable?"

Peter Mcloughlin says

The author strikes me as a worried good government centrist appalled at Donald Trump who is a corrupt incompetent narcissist racist sleaze who now occupies the White House. This is, of course, pretty damning stuff but unprecedented only in the magnitude of the disease. I suppose it might convince a few suburban moderate Republicans that Trump is a problem. The stuff presented in the book is well known and I think centrists who are against Trump are appreciated for having a little more discernment than the MAGA CHUDS. I think, however, a better book could be written by someone further to the left who understands the authoritarian right. Trump is the logical conclusion of the Republican southern strategy. He is the culmination of the Reagan revolution. He fits squarely at Republican ideology is racist, anti-democratic, authoritarian, plutocratic, sexist. He is the fulfillment, the very apogee of their worldview. He is Republican redux. The author treats Trump as some corrupt oligarch from outer space. Half the country has been marinating in Trumpism for forty years. To merely focus on his current misdeeds is the miss the forest for the trees.

Scott says

Nothing super-new in here, if you've been watching the news. It focuses on the Trump Administration's ineptitude/malfeasance when it comes to staffing government positions, undermining governmental norms, etc. It's well-researched.

The author, however, has a somewhat patronizing, let-me-explain-this-to-you-so-you'll-understand it style that rubbed me the wrong way and ultimately made the book a tedious experience for me.

I would NOT want to sit next to this guy on a long plane flight.

Jacqueline Kawate says

This is the best book written so far on the Trump administration. It is everything that Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury* book is not. This book is short on gossip and heavy on fact. It details how Trump and his Cabinet members have acted during his Presidency. It focuses on what they do rather than what they say. Most frightening to me is the long lasting damage that is being done, especially in the judiciary, the EPA, the Department of Education, health care, and the State Department. The actions taken by this administration will not only lower our quality of life, it will cost lives. The author is a Pulitzer Prize winning investigative journalist who has been reporting on Trump for 30 years. He is also an expert on tax policy.

Kinksrock says

"Trump lacks the emotional stability, knowledge, critical-thinking skills, and judgment to be commander in chief. Emotionally he remains the thirteen-year-old troublemaker his father sent off to a military academy Being stuck in the awkward year between childhood and maturity for nearly six decades is a terrible fate, one that has twisted Trump's personality and explains much of his narcissism, immature attitudes about women, disregard for others, and his imagined intellectual gifts shown by his frequent declaration that 'I'm like a smart person.'" (page 253)

Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House was a fun book to read. It provided anecdotes that demonstrated how unfit Trump is for the presidency, what a buffoon, what a joke, and how dysfunctional his administration is.

Mr. Johnston's book is not amusing. It is not fun to read. It lays out plainly that, while we are slapping our heads at what a buffoon this a--hole is, he is actually doing real damage to our country through his incredible combination of greed, incompetence, and -- yes -- racism. (If you are not ready to admit that Trump is a racist, you are willfully blind.)

The damage that this evil narcissist is doing to our country and how we are perceived abroad may take many years to fix, if they can be fixed. This book shows you what that damage is. And it's not funny.

Barry says

Just when you thought you couldn't feel any worse about the direction the United States is taking, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist David Cay Johnston delivers a hard and deeply reported dose of reality. Looking beyond the daily sideshow of presidential tweets and racist dog whistles, Johnston takes us into the agencies where Donald Trump's army of "termites" is hollowing out the federal government, and quietly instituting policies that will make the vast majority of Americans poorer, sicker and less well educated, and leave the nation less influential and competitive internationally.

Johnston lays bare the false promises Trump made in his campaign, and continues to make, while his administration systematically enriches billionaires -- including members of his cabinet -- and huge corporations and billionaires at the expense of Americans' health, careers, education and financial security.

In public policy, details matter, and from the EPA to the VA, Johnston provides details of intentional mismanagement, blatant self-dealing, direct corporate welfare, and willful ignorance that will, and should,

infuriate anyone who doesn't keep their assets in an overseas tax haven, or their children in an exclusive private school. If you ever found Donald Trump's volatility and outspokenness even a little bit refreshing or amusing, if you thought he might be just the uninhibited outsider to drain the swamp of Washington politics, reading "It's Even Worse Than You Think" will make you realize how destructive and terrifying this presidency really is.

Susan says

This is a very well written catalog of the damage that the current administration is doing to our country. I consider myself reasonable well informed; I read the Washington Post and New York Times daily, as well as following links from Twitter posts to the Atlantic, the New Yorker and other on-line news aggregators. Even after all that reading Johnston has uncovered things that I didn't know about before reading this book. It's well worth the time I spent on it, and I'll be reading more of Johnston's work.

Scott Rhee says

I, like many Americans, wake up every morning dreading what new Hell is in store for us and the world thanks to the Dumpster Fire that currently sits in the Oval Office as our commander-in-chief. That Trump is a liar, a tax cheat, a douchebag, an asshole, a narcissist, a compassionless moron, a seven-year-old wearing old men's clothes, a sack of shit, a mouth-breather, a racist, a misogynist, a potential sociopath, quite possibly mentally ill, and a fuckwad isn't really in dispute. Hell, even his supporters think most of this is true. They just don't care, for some reason, because "Hey, Trump got a lot of people \$200 bonuses" and "Well, because her e-mails..."

Today, Trump announced that he wants to have a giant military parade through Washington, D.C. Never mind the ridiculous cost in money, time, and security this will cost taxpayers: Trump supporters don't seem to care. They've let the millions we---the taxpayers---have already spent on his golf weekends and vacations and Secret Service manpower it involved slide, so why the fuck not have a military parade? North Korea, China, and Russia do it all the time, and those are three of his favorite countries, so there's that...

The question has stopped being "When is enough enough?" because we have all, sadly, discovered the answer to that, which is, "Never". Trump is apparently going to ride this all the way through to its inevitable end of dictatorial totalitarianism, and his supporters are along for the ride. Mark my word, if there isn't a violent uprising in the next year or two, Trump will have concentration camps set up all across the country, run by Joe Arpaio. It's there he will send all the CNN, MSNBC, and New York Times journalists. He'll also send every single late-night TV talk show host there (except for Jimmy Fallon: Trump likes when Fallon rubs his hair.), including the entire cast of Saturday Night Live (Alec Baldwin and Melissa McCarthy will, of course, be at the head of the line). Then he'll go after everybody who has ever said a mean word about him on Facebook and Twitter. Then, of course, he'll go after everybody who has ever written a book about him that isn't Sean Hannity or Ann Coulter. (Granted, he will have to go on the word of people who have actually read the books, because Trump doesn't read...)

One of those authors is David Cay Johnston, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist and author of seven books whose latest book "It's Even Worse Than You Think: What the Trump Administration is Doing to America" pretty much says it all in the title.

Johnston's book is probably the book everyone should be reading instead of Michael Wolf's "Fire and Fury"

but isn't because there are no sex scenes. Don't get me wrong: I look forward to reading Wolf's book. I have it on hold at my local library (I'm not dishing out \$15 at Target for that piece of shit), but I couldn't wait. In the wait time, I've discovered other scathing anti-Trump books out there.

Johnston's book may be relatively golden shower-free, but it's still pretty damn riveting, if you like a shitload of facts and data and statements that can actually be supported by lots of evidence. The nearly 30 pages of endnotes is impressive in itself, but it's also impressive that Johnston got all of his information by simply digging deeper into the morass of bullshit surrounding Trump and his lackeys. If anyone is "draining the swamp", it's actually Johnston.

Johnston covers everything in the (my God has it only been) one year that Trump has been President, which is actually a hell of a lot. Some of it--especially the transcripts, speeches, and memos that Johnston was privy to that never made it into mainstream media outlets or to the public at all--is both horribly frightening and strangely hilarious at the same time. Case in point: Trump's conversation with Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto, the full transcript of which was obtained and published by the Washington Post several months later: (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphi...>), in which Trump whined, "If you're not going to say that Mexico is going to pay for the wall, then I do not want to meet with you guys anymore because I cannot live with that." So much for the Great Negotiator.

There's also Trump's history of basic science denial and his commitment to considering global warming a "Chinese hoax": it would almost be funny if Trump's EPA, under Scott Pruitt, hasn't overturned nearly eight years of policy under Obama--including exiting the Paris Agreement--that was moving in the right direction. Trump's choice of Pruitt to run the EPA was a direct slap in the face to environmentalist and scientists. It may even be causing needless deaths.

Recently, a study was released that showed an unprecedented increase in black lung disease cases among coal miners in Appalachian states. While more studies need to be done, it strongly suggests a connection between Pruitt's EPA's attempts to roll back and eliminate regulations on industries such as coal mining and coal mining-related disease and death. (<https://www.npr.org/2018/02/06/583456...>)

I could give more examples, but frankly I'm sick and tired of Trump. I'm sick and tired of everything about him, his family, his wealth, his wormy ability to get out of paying taxes, his brilliant ability to manipulate and maneuver people's attentions away from the real problems facing this country by creating non-issues, his child-like inability to hear or accept anything critical or negative about himself by claiming that anything he disagrees with is "fake news", his supporters, his hair, his orange face, his tiny hands, his tiny dick, and his stupid brain.

kari says

Well researched and well written. Not politically slanted.
Read *Fire and Fury* to understand the personalities at work and this one for the policies.

Andy says

I've enjoyed this author's previous works of investigative reporting and thought this might be the smart

choice in the pile of Trump books, but I was disappointed. True, Trump is even worse than I thought, but so what? I already thought he was a shameless crook. It's not like we get to vote on a scale of 1-10. Maybe we ought to, but we don't.

Johnston's conclusion is that Trump is the symptom, not the disease. I agree, but then what we need is a book about the disease, i.e. what made millions of Americans vote for such a worthless, lying, giant bipedal turd. I recommend:

Michelle says

The title says it best: it is even worse than you think.

It's a shame this book hasn't received the same kind of attention that *Fire and Fury* has, as it covers some very important, and disturbing, things that have been happening while we were all looking the other way, distracted by tweets, sh*tholes, or any of a number of other things. And that was the overriding, macro-view takeaway of this book for me. I watch a lot of news, and much of it seems to be reporting on drama rather than policy. So there is a whole bunch of stuff happening that most people aren't aware of (and that goes for all governments). I guess this book isn't going to change anyone's mind - we're all so set in our mindsets these days - but it's still an important book. If you read this and you're okay with what's going on, then fine, good. But if you're not, well, I believe there are some elections coming up soon...

Mal Warwick says

Most of the books I've read about Donald Trump focus squarely on the man himself, his relations with the people surrounding him in the White House, and his outrageous behavior. David Cay Johnston's book is somewhat different. Trump's erratic actions and insults are acknowledged throughout. He is unquestionably the star of the story. But *It's Even Worse Than You Think: What the Trump Administration Is Doing to America* spotlights the policies Trump has promoted and the people he's named to senior positions in government. The picture is devastating. As Johnston notes at the outset, "the Trump presidency is unlike anything that came before, a presidency built on open public contempt for Constitutional principles."

Item: kleptocracy is the new normal

In a blatant violation of the law and the US Constitution, Trump is brazenly promoting his own businesses, most notably the Trump International Hotel in Washington and Mar-a-Lago in Florida. He is personally raking in many millions of dollars as a result. (Johnston's detailed description about how the scheme works is eye-opening.) And Trump is not alone in self-dealing. Key appointees are promoting the industries and the individual companies where they previously worked, and in some cases they're directly profiting from the policies they promulgate or the regulations they eliminate. Others, including at least one billionaire, are routinely traveling on the government's dime although their predecessors carefully paid for their own travel when on personal business.

Donald Trump frequently spoke about "draining the swamp" in his campaign. As one former official put it, "we thought they were talking about lobbyists, but they meant civil servants . . . the civil servants were the swamp." Instead, Trump has appointed industry allies, including many lobbyists, to run the agencies they have sued, lobbied, or otherwise weakened in the past. And the damage they are doing is little reported in the news media. I'll cite just two examples.

Item: Trump's "political termites" are undermining our government

Trump is attempting to defund a long list of government agencies, including not just such long-time Republican candidates for oblivion such as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting but less-well-known agencies including the Trade and Development Agency (TDA). The TDA encourages exports of high-value American goods and assists domestic companies that require assistance to operate successfully overseas, thus helping create jobs for American workers; its elimination would run counter to Trump's repeated insistence that he will create "job growth the likes of which our country has not seen in a very long time." (That's just one of many ways in which the Trump Administration is discouraging rather than encouraging job growth, a subject to which Johnston devotes a chapter of its own.) To ensure that these agencies are crippled even if Congress declines to defund them, Trump has appointed men and women like Betsy DeVos, Scott Pruitt, Rex Tillerson, and others with lower profiles who will make it difficult or impossible for their employees to perform their duties effectively. And they're doing a very good job of that—by failing to appoint the high-level officials needed to approve their work, by instituting policies and procedures designed to frustrate them, or simply by creating an environment within the agency that discourages aggressive action on behalf of the public.

Item: Trump's "forgotten man" is forgotten by his Administration

On the campaign trail, in his inaugural address, and in myriad ways since, Donald Trump has continued to emphasize that he is in office to protect the "forgotten man." He continually proclaims his concern for workers. But the actions he and his appointees have taken, and insist they will continue taking, are anything but supportive of middle-class working families. (Poor people are not just forgotten—they're not even mentioned among the forgotten.)

For example, by moving to emasculate the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Trump Administration is subjecting millions of us once again to the unrestrained predations of predatory lenders. By eliminating environmental regulations, they are exposing us all to foul air and polluted water and eroding one of our country's proudest accomplishments, our National Parks. By opening up our coastal waters for oil and gas exploration, they are endangering the livelihood and the quality of life of millions of Americans who live near the shore. By eviscerating OSHA, they are ensuring that "workers will pay the price for rolling back these hard-earned protections—in injury, illness, and death," in the words of one critic quoted by Johnston. And "[s]pending less on scientific research is not a policy to make or keep America great and it certainly is not a policy to put American workers first." As Johnston notes, "research shows that at least half of American economic growth since World War II stems from advances in science and technology"—and a disproportionate share of those advances have come from government labs or work financed by government grants.

The damage will last for decades

Yes, even if you faithfully follow the political news, you may conclude, as I did, that "it's even worse than you think." It's profoundly disturbing to read, chapter after chapter, the evidence of the damage Donald Trump and his appointees has already done to our country. Johnston ranges far afield, detailing the devastation at State, Education, the EPA, the VA, and other critical agencies. Even if Trump is forced out of office before his term is up, or the Democrats win control of both houses of Congress in the 2018 election and the presidency in 2020, cleaning up the mess may take decades. Simply recruiting and training replacements for all the experienced foreign service officers, scientists, and regulators fired or forced to resign will take many years. Restoring the morale of the departments they led won't be easy, either. Nor will the tedious work of recovering or rewriting the hard-fought regulations that protected our health and our financial wellbeing. And who knows how long the Federal courts will remain under the sway of Neil Gorsuch and like-minded "strict constructionists?" (Johnston's portrait of Gorsuch is unflattering to say the least. Yes, the newest Supreme Court Justice is even worse than I thought.)

David Cay Johnston is an investigative reporter specializing in economic and tax issues, to which he gives a great deal of attention in *It's Even Worse Than You Think*. He has won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting and

is the author of six previous nonfiction books.

Lis Carey says

David Cay Johnston is a working journalist who has covered Donald Trump for decades, and has written two previous books about him. In this book, he looks not at Trump's personal life and all the possible, ah, colorful details, which at this writing are much in the news, but strictly at his actions as President, and his business dealings that explain and illuminate those actions.

This is very much a fact-based book, examining what Trump has actually done, and the practical effects, as well as the direct contrast between Trump's specific and oft-repeated campaign promises to help, for instance, students struggling under student loans or workers who aren't finding jobs because companies have moved those jobs overseas, or to help small businesses, and what his policies really are. Trump has appointed Betsy DeVos to head the Dept. of Education. She has no real education experience, but is deeply involved in for-profit education companies. Under Trump and DeVos, President Obama's progress toward protecting students from predatory loan practices by for-profit schools are being reversed, not improved. This is just one easily summarized example. To fully understand this example and others, Johnston's careful detailing of the actions, their background, and their effects are necessary.

He lays out Trump's many conflicts of interest, and the extent to which Trump's approach to the Presidency is truly different not just from our most respected Presidents, but even from the ones we've considered incompetent or corrupt. We see how tangled, contradictory, and profoundly unhelpful his immigration actions and policies are to the American workers he has promised he will help with those immigration policies are. Again, another example, one better understood with Johnston's detail and context than in a short review.

This is an important book. It is fact-based, not ideology-driven. You will learn by reading or listening to it.

Highly recommended.

I bought this audiobook.

Lenngirl says

I have yet to read a book on Trump and/or his administration that doesn't make me think "But how is any of this even possible"? Lastly, with *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, this question was mainly focussed on the acting persons and their, uh, sort of working relationships with each other; within this book, the question is directed more towards the politics of said administration.

Basically, Johnston compares Trump's plans and promises during his campaign to what happened after he got elected and during the first months of his term. The book is well structured and tackles pretty much every issue, from jobs, taxes, climate denial, global affairs, education, law and order, to race, guns and immigration. Johnston reminds the reader what Trump said about these topics during his campaigns, the plans he had, the promises he made - and what's left of all of that after the first months of his administration (a non spoilerish spoiler: pretty much nothing). Of course most of this is known, there have been many examples I remember, thinking "But how and why does he get away with it?". Seeing all these issues combined makes an even more powerful impact. It's scary. And makes me wonder even more.

People who voted for Trump based on a certain promise should read this book and use it for a serious reality check. I'm thinking about, for example, all those veterans who'd hoped to get better medical care, more support, less bureaucracy and a 24-hour-emergency-support-hotline supervised by Trump himself (a non spoilerish spoiler: nothing of this happened). There are countless other groups like those veterans who should feel fooled by now - and still, I wonder how Trump and his administration get away with all of this. And if all these broken promises and their mostly, well, not really helpful results aren't enough, Johnston also chronicals how Trump and the Alt-Right grow closer. And this should be the final sign to get everybody's alarm bells ringing. Again, I know, all of this is known. But it doesn't hurt one bit to be reminded of it again and again.

Extra mention for the very powerful afterword, which makes a great closing argument. In general, Johnston does take this book on a certain emotional level - his helplessness and anger shine through (and I hear him!) - yet the book is still factual and an unbiased read (because facts *are* facts, there is no alternative version). However, the book lives from its all overshadowing conclusion: Trump is by no means fit for the job, way less than any president before him. And Johnston does a really good job showing why.
