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Defending Trump: A Debate on the Trump Presidency in Real Time

Stephen Barry
Mark Z. Lieberman
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A testament to the polarization of American political life since 2017, Defending Trump *is a fun and rigorous look at the many scandals, controversies, and accomplishments of the Trump administration.*

Stephen Barry and Marc Z. Lieberman's unusual political book *Defending Trump* collects snapshots from the time of the presidency of Donald J. Trump.

This mammoth work, which incorporates elements of both a history and a political science work, comments on and illuminates the seminal moments of the Trump administration. Its sections divided into months and years (the first section covers July 29 to December 31, 2017; later sections cover 2018, 2019, and 2020 in turn), the book is useful as it goes into granular detail about the major events from the course of a presidency. Its chapters short and focused on single subjects. In this manner, the book focuses on impressions and arguments, rather than theory.

Notable for its utility, the book stands to shock audiences with its reminders of events from the Trump administration that have more or less been forgotten by both the general public and media. For example, it recalls President Trump's decision to remove sizable numbers of US troops from eastern Ukraine, northern Syria, and Afghanistan; and, in the midst of its many reviews of the Russiagate and impeachment drama that dominated the presidency for years, the book reviews secondary incidents, as with the conflict around Jared Kushner receiving security clearance, and political themes, as with accusations that President Trump is a racist, or arguments that his supporters benefit from white privilege.

These topics are covered in real-time exchanges between Barry and Lieberman. They speak in the common tongue of the twenty-first century as they review moments from the Trump administration. Their views are in opposition to each other's: Barry voted for Donald Trump in 2016, while Lieberman oscillates between being critical and outright contemptuous of the president.

In format, the book reads like a movie script composed of nothing but questions and answers. Though it is long, its composition makes it quick and comprehensible. Humor mixes into the men's exchanges, as does *schadenfreude*; some exchanges are bitter. Barry and Lieberman's back-and-forth covers both pro-Trump and anti-Trump perspectives well: at one point, in 2017, Lieberman assures Barry that Trump will be removed from office by Democrats, Special Counsel Robert Mueller, and the FBI for trafficking in Russian (and then Ukrainian) conspiracies.

A testament to the polarization of American political life since 2017, *Defending Trump* is a fun and rigorous look at the many scandals, controversies, and accomplishments of the Trump administration.

BENJAMIN WELTON (March 11, 2021)

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