

# **Our Revolution Study Guide**

## **Our Revolution by Bernie Sanders**

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## Summary

Sanders presents the first section of his book as a semi-autobiographical tale of his upbringing, specifically the earliest formations of his political identity. From as early as his childhood in Brooklyn, Sanders recalls the elements and experiences that made him into the man he is today. His involvement in student activism groups at the University of Chicago solidified many of Sanders' core beliefs - civil rights, quality veterans' care, and equal economic opportunity for all. The majority of the first section of Sanders' book focuses not on himself, however, but on his presidential campaign. He describes the entire process from thinking about running to formally endorsing his opponent after his loss. If Sanders learned anything on the campaign trail, it is that the need for a political revolution did not die with his campaign. This is the very foundation of Sanders' book: if the desire to change the status quo is strong enough among the common people, it can still be achieved. Sanders was voted down, but - to him - not out.

Sanders uses the second section of his book to publicize his platform for a political revolution. Through a series of in-depth and highly critical analyses, Sanders compiles the most demanding issues facing America, and poses his own progressive solutions. Had his campaign had a different ending, this agenda is what a Sanders' presidency would look like. Ending a rigged and corrupt economy, ensuring universal access to health care and higher education, combating the real threat of climate change, achieving criminal justice and immigration reform, and protecting the nations' most vulnerable populations are Sanders' primary goals. He dedicates a chapter to each of these issues, fully explaining his legislative proposals and how the current system fails the working class.

Sanders' political initiatives and ideals are rooted in morality, a concept he believes too many politicians have abandoned. He preaches that it is the responsibility of the government to care for the nation's most vulnerable and oppressed populations: the poor, elderly, disabled, veterans, Native Americans, children, and those stuck in the cycle of poverty. His ideology is based on the framework laid by some of the world's greatest moral leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Pope Francis, and President Franklin Roosevelt. While he may not have been successful securing the Democratic nomination for the presidency, he was successful in starting a grassroots movement that, if led correctly, has the capacity to accomplish real political change.



# How Do We Turn Out the Way We Do?

## Summary

Sanders begins his memoir by introspectively analyzing his upbringing to demonstrate exactly how his political agenda and personal ideology have formed. He first uses his childhood in Brooklyn, New York to show the reader the earliest formation of his political inclinations. Before moving onto his education in Chicago and his life in Vermont, he focuses heavily on the impact Brooklyn played in shaping his thinking.

Sanders recalls various memories to highlight the valuable lessons he took from his childhood such as reading with his older brother, playing games with his friends on the street, clothes shopping with his mother, and rooting for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He notes that very early in his childhood he learned the importance of money in terms of social status; class distinctions were clear between kids who lived in apartment buildings and kids whose parents owned homes. Despite the fondness with which he remembers his summers at camp and memories with friends, he notes that his families' lack of money "was always a point of contention in the house" (10). Sanders concludes his ode to Brooklyn by reminiscing on his days as a Boy Scout and his high school career as a cross country runner.

Sanders next turns his attention to the University of Chicago. While it was overwhelming at first on a personal and social level, he soon found comfort in his school's library. He excitedly recalls the history books, biographies, and magazines which were actively helping to shape his political ideology. Sanders claims his involvement in student organizations such as the Young People's Socialist League, the Student Peace Union, and the Congress of Racial Equality taught him more than his time inside the classroom. An active member of these organizations, Sanders participated in rallies against war efforts, in favor of civil rights, and against police brutality. His efforts as a political activist were heavily inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose "life's work continues to inspire" Sanders (21).

After his graduation from the University of Chicago, Sanders found himself in rural Vermont. He lived in a town with a population of fewer than 200 called Stannard, where he became enamored with the rustic Vermont lifestyle. The sense of community in Stannard had a lasting impression on Sanders; "people need people," as he concluded (24). His life in Vermont was not glamorous by any means, but it was a life he was proud to live.

## Analysis

Sanders uses this chapter to make the simple argument that he believes in a direct relationship between one's physical upbringing and one's political ideology later in life. By studying his childhood in Brooklyn, his education at the University of Chicago, and



his rural life in Vermont before getting involved in politics, he gives the reader a look into how his identity became his identity.

He enlists memories that most people can easily relate to: playing with friends, summers spent at camp, and listening to his parents argue over money to name a few. He draws profound conclusions from seemingly simple memories, making him appear relatable to the reader while simultaneously examining the origins of his mentality. Playing baseball on the streets with his friends taught him how to exist in what he calls an “amazingly democratic and self-sustaining community” where he and his friends made the rules, enforced the rules, and settled disputes internally (12). He had his “first observations regarding the deficiencies of capitalism” in the form of the Brooklyn Dodgers moving to Los Angeles to pursue greater profits (13). In Sanders’ view, the cultural impact of the Brooklyn Dodgers should have outweighed the greedy desires of capitalism.

Sanders recalls the “indelible impact” World War II had on his small Jewish family and his perspective on life (8). However, he refrains from elaborating in much detail. Without stating it directly, Sanders implies his inherent disgust for war. This theme is repeated later in the chapter when discussing his time as an activist in college; he praises one of his heroes, Dr. King, for opposing the Vietnam war. King was “taking on the entire establishment,” a theme Sanders perpetually encourages throughout his book (21). Throughout his political career, he would continue to vehemently oppose war efforts.

He focuses heavily on his role as a political activist at the University of Chicago, where the various organizations he was involved in helped him to “look at politics in a new way” (18). He began to see a strong correlation between wealth, power, and capitalism, and noticed the inequalities that sprung from this relationship. It was in this capacity as an activist that he shows the reader the authenticity of his character; he fought for civil rights, peace, job fairness, and for those perpetually marginalized by the U.S. government. Today, as a Senator, Sanders fights for the same causes.

Sanders concludes his introductory chapter by explaining his years in Vermont before committing to politics. Compared to the effort exhausted examining Brooklyn and Chicago, Sanders gives a very brief explanation of Vermont. However, he attaches significant meaning to his home state and its people. The short length of this section is testament to how quickly Sanders jumped into Vermont politics. Being enamored with the sense of community and the rural landscape catapulted Sanders into the political sphere.

## Vocabulary

indelible, voracious, demarcated, pundits, deficiencies, kibbutzim



# My Political Life in Vermont

## Summary

Sanders uses this chapter to explain his early political life in his home state of Vermont. In 1971, he attended a meeting of the Liberty Union Party with one of his close friends to discuss filling a vacant House and Senate seat, where he was unexpectedly nominated to run for said Senate seat. He impressed those present at the meeting with a long-winded speech about economics, education, and the Vietnam War. Capturing only one percent of the vote in this race may not have looked good on paper, but Sanders felt confident about his progression as a politician. Two failed attempts at governorship and again at the Senate prompted Sanders to temporarily put politics behind him and pursue a career as a small media producer.

In 1980, Sanders was advised by an intelligent and politically minded colleague to run for mayor of the city of Burlington. His strategy in this campaign was to bring together the many groups in the city that felt marginalized by their government: labor unions, minorities, working families, and environmentalists. He wanted to pursue a grassroots approach, going door-to-door answering constituents' questions. In 1981 in an unexpected victory, Sanders "bucked the two-party system," and became the only socialist mayor in America (32).

One of Sanders' first actions as mayor was to create several advisory councils to fulfill his ambitious campaign promises. These councils focused on the youth, arts, women, seniors, health care, and tax reform among other issues. His ambition was met with resistance from the existing city government, which consisted of Democrats reluctant to accept political change. Sanders attempted to work around his colleagues, creating a successful Little League program and summer concert series despite constant opposition. Eventually, he recognized the need for progressive supporters on his team to achieve real reform. He and his colleagues formed the Progressive Coalition and successfully elected more progressive politicians to the city government, which ultimately paved the way for Sanders' many accomplishments as mayor.

His accomplishments comprise the bulk of this chapter: he achieved an unprecedented level of tax reform, expanded cultural events such as poetry nights, expanded the city's police department, purchased a new fleet of snow removal vehicles, helped implement a state and federally backed initiative to rebuild Burlington's sewer systems, enacted a waterfront rehabilitation program, and accomplished affordable housing programs that were later adopted nation-wide.

Sanders success as mayor prompted him to try again for a spot in Congress. In 1990, he was elected to the House of Representatives and became the first U.S. congressman in 40 years to be elected outside of the two-party system. He prides himself on his 16-year proven record fighting on behalf of workers' rights, seniors, women, children, the LGBT community, and the environment. He also proudly recalls



his help in forming the House Progressive Caucus, which has “been a vanguard in the fight for economic and social justice since its inception” (43). In 2006, Sanders ran an energetic campaign for an empty Senate seat and unexpectedly won.

Sanders’ efforts in the Senate reflected those of his time in the House of Representatives. With a larger influence in the Senate, Sanders pushed climate change legislation, Wall Street reform, Social Security expansion, and a closer investigation of the pharmaceutical industry. In 2010, Sanders famously filibustered for eight and a half hours against legislation which perpetuated tax breaks for the wealthy. His speech not only gained national recognition, but was also published into a book. Sanders observed that his “ideas were beginning to generate more interest,” an idea that helped persuade him to run for the presidency (47).

## Analysis

Sanders sees his unusual entrance into the political sphere as a testament to the power of grassroots politics. Common people heard a fellow citizen’s ideas, saw a practical application for these ideas, and rallied behind him. Though his first few campaigns were unsuccessful, he explains them so the reader can see the evolution – or lack thereof – of Sanders’ approach to politics. Sanders is adamant that he has been a long-standing supporter of certain key issues from his first Senatorial campaign to his presidential bid.

Sanders uses his first Senatorial campaign to demonstrate to the reader how it “laid the foundation for everything [he has] done politically since” (26). He captured only two percent of the vote in this election, and only spent about \$1,000. This campaign mirrored his presidential campaign in some ways such as the emphasis on grassroots organizing and the use of energetic rallies. This entire chapter is used as a tool to show the reader the concrete nature of Sanders’ belief system; he wants the reader to see that he was always been a champion of the progressive movement. Throughout this process, he learned he enjoyed talking to strangers about politics as well as researching the nation’s biggest issues. These themes continue to define Sanders’ politics today, as evident through his effective use of rallies during his presidential campaign.

Sanders is admittedly proud of Burlington, Vermont. He is equally as proud of his achievements as mayor of Burlington, citing U.S. News & World Report’s claim that he was “one of the best mayors in America” (35). The majority of this chapter is dedicated to his long list of achievements as mayor. By detailing his values, platforms, and leadership abilities, Sanders creates a nostalgic image of his younger self; in this capacity, his younger self seems like the perfect future presidential candidate. Most remarkably, however, Sanders notes that his service as mayor brought about a resurgence in voter turnout. He claims that the people of Burlington finally saw their “local government working in their interests, and they came out in large numbers to support it” (35). His presidential campaign would aim to prove to all Americans that the government is capable of working for them, not against them.





As Sanders became introduced to Congress, members were voting on the first Gulf War. Despite being a rookie in the House, Sanders vehemently opposed the war effort by stating that he “feared not only the immediate impact of the war... but what it portended for the future” (42). He feared such deep involvement in Iraqi politics would permanently entangle the U.S. in Middle Eastern affairs. During his time in the House and Senate he fought strongly for more stringent regulations on Wall Street and he fought against the greed of the pharmaceutical industry. In 2013, Sanders became chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, a chair he held with pride. Peaceful foreign policy, veterans’ care, Wall Street regulation and greater access to prescription drugs were all staples in Sanders’ presidential campaign, proving to the reader that Sanders’ values have always aligned.

Sanders’ famous filibuster on the Senate floor in 2010 catapulted him into the scope of mainstream media. While he was first seen as a third-party outlier, this eight-and-a-half-hour speech against a Bush-era tax initiative transformed Sanders into a progressive leader in the eyes of the media. The more attention his filibuster raked in, the more confident Sanders became that his progressive ideology was workable on a national scale.

## Vocabulary

balked, portended, vanguard, pontificating, buoyed

# Thinking About Running

## Summary

Sanders begins this chapter by addressing four basic reasons that enforced his decision to run for the presidency: Hillary was too centrist and too entrenched in the “Democratic establishment” (48) to run unopposed, there were no other potential democratic candidates, he had the privilege of testing the waters before committing to candidacy, and he saw Vermont’s political history as a platform for the nation’s future. These aspects collectively gave Sanders the confidence to finally announce his candidacy.

Sanders made the decision to test the waters to determine whether there was enough nationwide support for a Sanders presidency. He had done well in Vermont politics, but understood the necessity of “a fifty-state effort” for this campaign (57). Instead of focusing on democratic strongholds, Sanders wanted to appeal to those who had lost faith in the political system. He was well-received in red states in the Deep South, where he found there were people of all races “who were sick and tired of the economic and political status quo” (61). Sanders spoke with the leaders of progressive organizations, labor unions, and Veterans’ organizations nationwide to expand his support at the grassroots level to something more concrete and credible. Sanders began holding large fundraising events with small entrance fees which proved to be very successful. Sanders saw the excited supporters attending his rallies as evidence of growing support for his ideas.

Though he knew little about the workings of a national campaign, Sanders knew the states of Iowa and New Hampshire were “make or break” (70). During his initial trips to these states he saw a surprising amount of support, noting an overall lack of enthusiasm for local Democratic candidates. This was not specific to Iowa and New Hampshire; he notes that “establishment Democratic politicians often have very few roots in their communities,” ultimately making it harder for them to generate genuine enthusiasm (74). However, the progressive communities in these as well as other states impressed Sanders immensely. The Culinary Workers Union in Nevada, the nurses’ union in California, and progressive students’ groups in New Hampshire were all praised by Sanders for their forward-thinking and hard-working members. His travels proved that the American people wanted real change, and a Sanders’ presidency may be the change they were looking for.

Considering running transformed Sanders in the eyes of the media from a common Senator to potential president. The increased media presence further bolstered his support; he was now confident in his potential campaign’s fundraising and volunteer capabilities. Ultimately, to make his decision, he reflected on the memory of his campaign for mayor of Burlington. In this historic victory, Sanders witnessed first-hand the strength of grassroots progressive politics. The federal government needed the same type of progressive overhaul. Quietly, on May 26, Sanders announced his decision to run for president.



## Analysis

Throughout his book, Sanders places the ideas before his own image. His vision is the birth of a progressive political movement, not just one isolated candidate in one isolated election. One of his biggest fears was that if his campaign were not successful, the progressive ideas which he felt resonated so well with everyday Americans would be rejected and forgotten. He criticizes both Democrats and Republicans for their lack of focus on important issues, offering the reader a clear contrast between Sanders and established partisan elites. For example, he criticizes Hillary Clinton for her close relationship to Wall Street, corporate media, and big-money interests, stating “you cannot take on the establishment when you take their money” (51).

His criticisms of Republicans are harsher and more direct than those against Clinton. While traveling the South to get a feel for the issues facing the region, Sanders blamed the Republican party for convincing white southerners to vote against their best interests by perpetuating racial tensions. “The essence of their politics,” he claims, relies on their “ability to divide people up” (59). While visiting the South, Sanders also noticed the working class’ overall lack of interest in politics, something he also blames on Republicans. A “lack of political consciousness is exactly what the ruling class of this country wants,” in order to keep the political status quo operating as is (66).

One of Sanders’ biggest concerns with establishment politics is the broken campaign finance system in place today. Elections are essentially bought and sold by large corporations with billions to spend in support of a candidate who will perpetuate the corporations’ interests. Sanders enlists the rhetoric of Abraham Lincoln to call on voters to truly enact a government “of the people, by the people, for the people” (81). Sanders believes issues should be at the heart of political campaigns - not money. Throughout his campaign, Sanders would focus on small-donor events to tackle campaign finance reform head-on.

Overall, this is one of the most critical chapters in Sanders’ book. He admits that deciding to run for president was not an easy decision. However, he felt a sense of responsibility to the large number of Americans he spoke with nationwide who expressed the need for progressive political reform. Sanders suggests that the natural solution to the volatile political culture of the U.S. is a grassroots political revolution; he just happens to be the most qualified progressive candidate. In establishing himself as the best candidate, however, he heavily criticizes the existing political system, from President Obama and Senator Hillary Clinton to the entire Republican establishment. In other sections of his book, he reflects with pride on refraining from using attack ads throughout his political career. Some of his rhetoric in this chapter, however, could be the script for a common attack ad.

## Vocabulary

oligarchy, marvel, hawkish, malfeasance, formidable, incongruous, raucous



# How Do You Run a Presidential Campaign?

## Summary

Sanders dedicates the bulk of this chapter to his campaign's message. He claims he has always known "that the most important part of any successful campaign is the message," which for him "was the easy part" (87). First and foremost, his campaign aimed to give a voice to those "almost always ignored by government," including working families, the elderly, youth, the sick, and the poor (87). He wanted to unite these groups in a fight against corporate media and the ruling class. He promised to "inject the radial concept of 'morality' into the campaign," before posing a series of questions dissecting the lack of morality in today's current political environment (88). Sanders compares the U.S. to other developed nations in the world, and highlights the deficiencies present in our current system that more democratic nations have solved. He knew his campaign would ask the correct questions, but he knew spreading the message would be an enormous task.

Sanders uses the remainder of this chapter to show the reader his thought process when constructing his campaign strategy. First and most importantly to Sanders, his campaign would rely heavily on rallies, which he proudly states are "what democracy is all about" (90). Sanders has always placed an importance on face-to-face contact with voters. He felt there was no better tool to energize, strengthen, and unite voters. Rallies were essential to Sanders' vision of grassroots democracy.

Sanders then describes the human infrastructure he created to support his campaign. His initial problem was that no political consultants in the D.C. area had experience running a democratic socialist's presidential campaign. Without having a direct model, Sanders and his team relied on three past candidates whose campaigns were considered progressive: Jesse Jackson, Dennis Kucinich, and Barack Obama. From these campaigns, Sanders learned transportation tips, fundraising tools, and much needed advice on how to effectively use social media. Sanders' immediate family also played a large part in his campaign. His wife Jane served as his key adviser and media surrogate, while he notes that his children were "as involved as their schedules allowed" (98).

Sanders knew from the preliminary stages that volunteer efforts would be crucial to his campaign. Implementing a grassroots volunteer organization would be the only way to effectively take on the entire Democratic establishment. Support on the common level was there, but Sanders needed the help of large-scale progressive organizations and fellow politicians. Though only five Congressmen supported Sanders at first, he won the support of MoveOn.org and Democracy for America and their large memberships. He had to fight for it, but Sanders made impressive strides in his campaign's organizational abilities.



Raising money was one of Sanders most principle concerns throughout his campaign. Contrary to most presidential candidates, Sanders focused on small donations through online fundraising and low-cost events. Volunteer efforts were helpful, but Sanders recognized the need for paid employees to run a credible nationwide campaign. This meant producing television ads, something he was never fond of. He boasts that throughout his entire political career, he has never run a negative ad. With plans in place for fundraising, organizational efforts, staffing, and his campaign's message, he was prepared to hit the campaign trail.

## Analysis

Sanders begins this chapter by stating his campaign's message confidently and clearly. What was not as clear to him, however, is exactly how he would spread his progressive agenda. The title of this chapter addresses Sanders' most pressing question: How Do You Run a Presidential Campaign? Sanders is confident in his ideology and his policy-making abilities, but this chapter makes it clear that Sanders lacked the finesse necessary to run an effective national campaign. Unlike his opponent Hillary Clinton, Sanders was not a recognizable figure, had never run a national campaign, and was literally millions of dollars behind in fundraising. Sanders is attempting to clarify how much of an underdog he actually was in this race.

He admits that his goal was not merely to win the presidency, but to start a "strong grassroots movement" which would dismantle the current political establishment (87). This dynamic presents Sanders with a problem: he ideally wants a complete government overhaul, but he also knows that to put his movement in place, he had to participate in the ugly side of campaigning. Sanders detests the more conventional forms of campaigning such as fundraising targeted toward wealthy special interests and producing negative TV ads. To combat this, Sanders lays out a plan centered on face-to-face rallies with voters, low-donor fundraising events, and a pledge to not use negative advertising. Though he knew political reform would not take place over the course of his campaign, he was confident his team was taking a step toward real change.

The more campaigning Sanders did, the more confident he was in the strength of his message among common citizens. However, the support of the public was useless to Sanders without some support from established politicians and progressive organizations. While many organizations pledged an early allegiance to Clinton, Sanders noticed an important pattern among the remaining groups: organizations which allowed their members to decide which candidate to support typically supported Sanders, while organizations whose support was decided by executive boards typically learned toward Clinton. To Sanders, this is a clear demonstration of establishment politics in action. The voices of the many could easily be silenced by the voices of the elite few, a trend Sanders hoped to change with his campaign.

Sanders understood the potential power of social media, but admittedly knew he had to hire young people to effectively harness this power. He wanted to use social media to



not only communicate his ideas, but to fundraise. He notes that the majority of his campaign's donations came in online, which he boasts is evidence of his devotion to campaign finance reform. Sanders attributes his success with the younger generation to his campaigns' effective use of social media. With a pinch of cockiness in his tone, he claims his campaign "wrote the book" for "showing the potential of social media" in progressive politics (100). Because his support was so much stronger at the grassroots level, Sanders needed social media and its wide audience to campaign at the national level.

## Vocabulary

disservice, dispossessed, spry, expenditures, grassroots

# The Campaign Begins

## Summary

On May 26, 2015 in Burlington, Vermont, Sanders announced his formal decision to run for President of the United States. The body of his announcement speech is the entire body of this chapter. He uses his speech as a clear declaration of his campaign's platform, titled, "Today We Begin a Political Revolution" (117). The first half of his speech focuses on what he thinks are the most important issues facing the U.S., and he concludes with his agenda if elected president.

The goal of Sanders' revolution was "to transform our country economically, politically, socially, and environmentally" (117). He emphasizes that this presidential campaign was not about any particular candidate, but it was about "the needs of the American people, and the ideas and proposals that effectively address those needs" (118). The key issues Sanders' campaign focused on would be income and wealth inequality, economics, Citizens United, and climate change.

Sanders' agenda for his potential presidency addresses all his key issues and expands on their specifics. In regards to the U.S. economy, he addresses the needs to create jobs, reconstruct trade agreements, raise American wages, repair the wealth gap, reform Wall Street, and achieve campaign finance reform. He covers a range of social issues as well: reversing the effects of climate change, providing universal health care and access to higher education, and expanding services to the nations' most vulnerable. Finally, he pledges to defend the nation responsibly, claiming to end America's intrusive pattern of involvement in foreign wars.

Sanders concludes his speech and this chapter by summarizing his plans for a future America. He envisions universal health care, affordable child care and higher education, and improved seniors' and veterans' care. Most importantly, he envisions a country where every citizen "no matter their race, their religion, their disability, or their sexual orientation, realizes the full promise of equality that is our birthright as Americans" (128). Equality for all is Sanders' American dream, and his presidency seeks to achieve it.

## Analysis

The chapter is interesting because it consists of a mere two pages of introduction before diving into the text of Sanders' announcement speech. He uses the direct text of his speech as a testament to his authenticity. He does not feel the need to dissect his words and explain his ideas, because they are so clearly laid out in his speech. This is yet another one of Sanders' attempts to challenge the political status quo; his speeches are his own scribbled down ideas, not carefully choreographed talking points that hold no substantial depth.



The first part of his speech addresses the key issues Sanders believes are plaguing American society: income and wealth inequality, economics, Citizens United, and climate change. He identifies income and wealth inequality in America as “the great moral issue of our time,” because “the grotesque level of inequality” between the wealthy few and the common man is contradictory to the foundations of American democracy (120). He identifies the need to change America’s economic system in order to expand the benefits and opportunities possible for the disappearing middle class. Part of changing the economic system is achieving campaign finance reform, which Sanders believes is only possible through the repealing of the Supreme Court’s decision in favor of Citizens United. He condemns wealthy families such as the Koch brothers for their gross spending in political campaigns, noting that in the 2016 presidential election the brothers were projected to spend more money than either the Republican or Democratic parties. Sanders closes his first part of his speech by addressing climate change, declaring the urgency with which America needs to invest in sustainable energy sources.

The second half of his speech frameworks Sanders’ agenda if elected president. His economic plan focused on infrastructure-specific jobs programs, restricting the movement of manufacturing plants offshore, raising the minimum wage to \$15, confronting gender disparities in pay, improving workers’ benefits such as sick leave and vacation time, ending tax breaks for the wealthy, breaking up the large banks that control Wall Street and much of the government, and establishing the public funding of political elections. He would push for a single-payer Medicare system for all, expand Social Security, impose a universal pre-kindergarten system, fight for lower interest rates on student loans, and join international efforts to combat terrorism responsibly. This laundry list of ideas is Sanders’ formal declaration of the ideology he has spent his entire political career forming.

He begins and ends this chapter and ends his speech with allusions to the Lake Champlain waterfront where the speech was given. His initial statement is brief; while describing to the reader the setting of the speech, he mentions it was being held at the park he “helped to create when [he] was mayor thirty years before” (115). The beautiful scenery of the park and the value it added to Burlington socially and economically is clearly one of Sanders’ most prized achievements. While ending his speech, he challenges those who doubt his revolution’s credibility to look at the park there were standing, which “was once an unsightly rail yard that served no public purpose” (128). With the help of progressive leaders and their many grassroots supporters, they were able to defeat the existing city government and prove that “when people stand together, and are prepared to fight back, there is nothing that can’t be accomplished” (128). This is Sanders’ call to arms; he wants voters to know that his proven record of coordinating grassroots movements in Vermont was possible on the national scale.

## Vocabulary

venture, staunch, proliferation, cobble, unconscionable



# On the Campaign Trail

## Summary

Sanders dedicates this chapter to his experience along the presidential campaign trail. He was clearly the underdog, but came out of the race a nationally known figure who stands proudly for progressive politics. First and foremost, Sanders addresses the massive challenge of tackling the Clinton machine. An overwhelming amount of Democratic news networks, politicians, citizens' organizations, activist groups, labor unions, and environmentalists had pledged their allegiance to Clinton early on. Furthermore, she had already received tens of millions in campaign donations by the time Sanders announced his run for the presidency. Sanders understood the importance of mobilizing grassroots support if he were to have any success on the national stage.

Sanders' campaign hinged on early successes. He recognized the need to do well in the early states of Iowa and New Hampshire if they were going to have any real success. Without strong performances in these states, "the media would lose interest, our funding would dry up, and the campaign would be dead in its tracks" (131). Sanders' first trip after announcing his campaign was to New Hampshire, where his strategy was to reach as many people face-to-face as possible. A trip to Iowa was the next stop, where his strategy was similar. He held rallies in towns that had never seen a presidential candidate before, which he sees as an example of an "insurgent campaign" (134). After Iowa was Minnesota, where Sanders spoke to a crowd of 3,000 citizens enthusiastic about political change. Sanders' first campaign stops were more successful than even he imagined, positioning him confidently in stride behind Clinton.

Sanders continues to describe his successes and obstacles along the campaign trail. In Wisconsin in July, he held the largest rally of any candidate until that point with 10,000 in attendance. His campaign was successfully bringing in more supporters and donations via social media; he was winning the support of union memberships; he was making progress in the Latino community; and he was closing the gap in the polls. However, several problems haunted the early months of his campaign. His campaign was rarely mentioned on national television news, Clinton's support from the black community was strong, and he was still unable to earn the support from establishment politicians. As has been the pattern for most of Sanders' political career, he had plenty of grassroots support with almost no organizational support.

Sanders' grassroots support continued to thrive throughout his campaign. The thousands of people being drawn to Sanders' rallies forced major media outlets to pay attention to Sanders. As the Democratic Presidential Debate approached, Sanders knew it was his best opportunity to gain a serious national foothold. His debate strategy was to focus on the issues and not on his opponents. He wanted a chance to address what the voters were concerned with, which he felt confident he did. However,



mainstream media focused on two of his comments toward Clinton and her email scandal, and did not cover one word of his speech on the real issues.

As his campaign progressed and his poll numbers rose, Sanders noticed two of his perceived weaknesses as a presidential candidate, foreign policy and his allegiance to democratic socialism. While Clinton may have more hands-on experience in terms of foreign policy, Sanders believes his overall foreign policy judgement is better than hers based on his vote against the war in Iraq. He also openly embraced the ideals of democratic socialism in a formal speech aimed at creating a realistic image of his political ideology. For Sanders, democratic socialism is healthy medium between a flawed democracy and an entirely socialism system.

Sanders' initial campaign strategy was to focus at the grassroots level in the early states of Iowa and New Hampshire. After a tie and a win respectively in those states, Sanders was energized heading into Nevada, South Carolina, and Super Tuesday, yet he knew where his problems were. He admits to spending an enormous but necessary amount of time and money in Iowa and New Hampshire, which ultimately deterred him from the amount of grassroots campaigning he wished to do in the later states. Despite grueling efforts in close states like New York and California, Sanders came up too short and lost the Democratic nomination. However, he ends this chapter on a positive note, boasting of the provisions he was able to work into the Democratic Party platform including Wall Street reform, expanding Social Security, and abolishing the death penalty.

## Analysis

Arguably the most important chapter in the first section of his book, this chapter describes Sanders' journey on the campaign trail. While other chapters were broken into distinct sections, this chapter is written in the style of a chronological narrative of his campaign efforts. Sanders cites a CNN News report that Sanders had to form a "grassroots uprising" if he was to win the nomination, something he knew as well (130). Sanders uses this chapter to put together the ideological, physical, and organizational efforts detailed in previous chapters to ultimately form his presidential campaign platform. All of the work done in the previous chapters comes together in this chapter, where Sanders gives a firsthand account of his unexpectedly popular presidential campaign.

As Sanders' campaign was gaining momentum, Clinton's "political vulnerabilities were becoming more and more apparent" (136). Democrats were beginning to see Clinton's initial support for the war in Iraq, her late support of gay marriage, her support of certain trade agreements, and her ties to Wall Street as an opportunity for a different, more progressive candidate. Sanders wanted to capitalize on the doubt cast on Clinton, which he did by playing both his strengths and his weaknesses. He not only highlighted the differences between himself and Clinton, but he heavily campaigned in Latino communities which had a long history of supporting her agenda. He prides his campaign on becoming widely supported in the Latino community despite entering the race with virtually no name recognition.



He continuously reminds the reader of the donations he received throughout his campaign, as well as the growing sizes of his rallies' audiences. He notes that in the first 24 hours of his candidacy, he received \$1.5 million in contributions from 35,000 donors. Four days after his announcement, his contributions doubled to \$3 million from 75,000 donors (133). He does this to show the clear explosion of his campaign at the grassroots level. Sanders also focuses on his rallies; he goes from being shocked at a crowd of 3,000 in Minnesota, to speaking to an enthusiastic crowd of 28,000 in Seattle. He uses these numbers to give the reader definitive proof of his campaign's unprecedented success.

Though this chapter is not clearly organized, some ideas are contained. On p.144, for example, Sanders devotes a clear, page-long section to his efforts against climate change. Most of the chapter reads as a narrative, but there are certain instances such as this that interject the flow of his storytelling. Again on p.157, Sanders provides a heading, "The Debate." Though he has employed the use of headings and sub-sections in previous chapters, this is the lone heading in Chapter 6. Sanders' unkempt hair and style of clothing painted him as a disorganized, slightly erratic character, which his writing seems to reflect as well.

As Sanders discusses the various unions, organizations, politicians, and celebrities who came out in support of him over the course of his campaign, he attaches a moral significance to each of his supporters. National Nurses United, for example, supported him despite their 90% female membership. Sanders interprets this as the possibility for women's support nationwide. He perceives an invitation to speak at a fundamentalist Christian college as an effort to bridge the gap that religious differences have created in politics. His rallies in southern states taught him "in one of the most rural parts of a rural state, there was significant interest in the need for a political revolution" (134). Finally, Hillary Clinton had a long history of support from the leaders of national unions, but Sanders was "gaining support among the rank and file" (138). This is a testament to grassroots politics and the cornerstone of Sanders' envisioned political revolution. He uses these examples to prove that his ideas had support at the grassroots level nationwide.

While an AP reporter titled Sanders' campaign an "opportunistic campaign," one reporter describes it as an "insurgent campaign" (142,146). Sanders does not refute these claims, presumably because he sees them as compliments. Sanders' campaign is rooted in fighting the establishment, which is exactly what an opportunistic insurgent would do. "In terms of excitement and energy, there was no question as to who was in first place," Sanders boasts (154). This energy fueled his insurgency, but he ultimately failed to push past the boundary that the Clinton machine had forged. Despite several close races, Sanders lost the Democratic nomination to Hillary Clinton, but did not turn from his progressive political revolution. Instead, he worked tirelessly to interject some of his biggest ideas into the Democratic Party platform. The sole fact that the book does not end here demonstrates Sanders' commitment to his revolution; instead of running, losing, telling the story, and returning to the Senate, Sanders adds his "agenda for a new America" as a second half of this book, signifying his openness to running again in the future (183).

## Vocabulary

microcosm, druthers, trounced, assuagement, barnstorm



# Defeating Oligarchy

## Summary

The key to defeating oligarchy is democracy; to Sanders, “democracy is about one person, one vote” (185). He uses the first section of this chapter to tell the history of America’s turbulent struggle with real democracy. Various groups have been denied civil rights including the right to vote throughout American history, such as women, blacks, and the poor. Sanders argues that America could not be truly democratic until it put the vote in the hands of all its citizens. Black suffrage, women’s suffrage, banning the poll tax, and lowering the voting age were all pivotal moments in America’s stride toward democracy for all.

Sanders is clear that big money has no place in a democratic government. His first reference to oligarchs in this chapter is in describing wealthy elites and their seemingly successful attempts to buy the American government. A small number of billionaire families hold more power financially and politically over any other American, including most elected officials. Their ownership of news outlets, think tanks, citizens’ groups, and university chairs made their influence virtually inescapable.

Sanders blames recent years’ low voter turnout on the systematic efforts of the Republican party. Strict ID regulations, invalid accusations of voter fraud, eliminating same-day registration and early voting, and closing polling locations were all done purposely, Sanders claims, “to impact the outcome of the election by making it harder to vote” (195). He notes that this only adds to the disconnect felt between common citizens and the government. Sanders takes a shot at the Republican party by saying that they have no problem spending “hundreds of billions of dollars to defend this nation,” while instead they “can and should spend the money necessary to defend democracy” (197). In other words, the concerns of the American citizens need to be put first.

Sanders spends a large section of this chapter discussing the Koch brothers and their influence in the American political system. Their involvement in the 2016 election in particular was important to Sanders. He states that the Koch brothers were planning on outspending both the Republican and Democratic parties to achieve, secure, and perpetuate a far-right wing government at the local, state, and federal level. This deeply entrenched political involvement is what Sanders deems detrimental to the essence of democracy.

Sanders concludes this chapter by citing Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, as he has done previously in this book. He fears that the damage done by the nation’s corrupt campaign finance system will ultimately cause the end of a “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (203). He calls the American people to take serious steps against the shift toward oligarchy by electing more progressive officials, such as himself, to repeal Citizens United and restore fundamental ideals of democracy.



## Analysis

In the first section of this chapter, Sanders alludes to the famous unalienable rights given in the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. He is obviously not the first politician to echo this phrase, but he goes one more line in-depth and recites a line not as easily recognizable: “That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed” (186). Sanders repeats the last part of the phrase, as if to remind the American public what their government was founded to do. The consent of the governed, Sanders argues, is not at the forefront of modern American politics – instead there is greed.

One of Sanders’ main concerns with the concentration of wealth is how it has affected elections across the board at the local, state, and national level. The 2010 Supreme Court ruling in favor of Citizens United virtually overlooks corporations’ campaign contributions, allowing millions of dollars to be spent in favor of corporate interests. He criticizes the wealthy few for pumping “billions of dollars into the political process to buy elections for politicians who will be beholden to them” (189). This complaint supports Sanders’ tireless efforts to reform the campaign finance system in the United States. Sanders believes the influence of big money in politics is undermining American democracy.

The Koch brothers and their billions of dollars’ worth of political influence are a subject of interest to Sanders. Interestingly, Sanders’ relies entirely on one of the brother’s campaign platforms when he ran for vice president in 1980 to outline their ideals. Their view of democracy, in stark contrast to Sanders’, is “a nation in which elected officials are bought and paid for by the moneyed interests” (199). Some of their views include ending government welfare programs, aid to the poor, the Postal Service, and the privatization of schools and roads. While they seem like extreme views, Sanders uses them to highlight “the views of the very people helping bankroll today’s Republican Party,” which will soon be the views of the party in control of the White House and the Senate (200).

Sanders diverts from discussing democracy and oligarchy to briefly focus on campaign finance reform, an issue he has made a point to touch on in every chapter thus far. Sanders understands that many average citizens do not see campaign finance reform as a pressing issue, but Sanders urges the reader otherwise. He insists there is a “direct connection between campaign funding and the development and implementation of public policy” (201). To prove this point, he provides recent examples of the dangers that come with a corrupt system: the recession of 2008, the growing power of the pharmaceutical industry, the nation’s massive defense spending budget, and the political community’s refusal to accept climate change despite research. These issues span a variety of disciplines, yet they all benefit a select few while harming the rest of the nation.



Sanders invokes the spirit of a political revolution by citing Abraham Lincoln in his final section of this chapter. His call to arms is not party-specific, but instead he calls campaign finance reform an “American issue,” that is the key to ending oligarchy and getting big money out of politics (204). He uses the success of his presidential campaign as a symbol that the “American people are sick and tired of big money buying elections and democracy being undermined” (205). Though his presidential dreams are on hold, he is engrossed in the process of creating a political revolution.

## Vocabulary

beholden, incumbent, junkets, subsume, litmus



# The Decline of the American Middle Class

## Summary

One of the shortest chapters in his book, Sanders uses this chapter to highlight what he believes is the great moral, economic, and political issue of our time: the decline of the American middle class. Not only is the middle-class population dwindling, but living conditions of the poor and middle class are deteriorating as well. Most significantly to Sanders, this is all happening alongside a class of wealthy families whose extravagant living conditions and political station continue to improve.

Inequality is Sanders' central focus behind the disappearance of the middle class. Wealth inequality is obvious, but Sanders finds income inequality just as detrimental to the middle and lower classes. And while these inequalities have always been present in American society, Sanders argues they began to get much worse at the beginning of the twenty-first century when "powerful special interests started demanding a bigger and bigger slice of the pie" (210). He argues that the government has created a culture centered around work, which offers little sick and vacation time, few benefits and skimpy wages.

Sanders then goes into detail about the specific groups affected most by the government's ignorance of the working class, specifically young people who did not attend college, those struggling with massive student debts, older workers, Social Security beneficiaries, and factory workers whose jobs were sent overseas. Not only were middle class Americans struggling to compete with greedy employers, most were forced to work multiple jobs to support their families. While struggle is part of the American experience, no longer does struggle result in a better life for one's children.

Sanders is clear to point out that the decline of the middle class is not an isolated phenomenon in certain regions. Instead, it can be seen nationwide from the barren auto fields of Detroit to the deserted coal mines in West Virginia. Despite the poor conditions and declining quality of life, he notes that the people in these depressed former middle class communities were "fighting for the opportunities they needed to improve their lives" (217). Sanders concludes this chapter by connecting this chapter to the next one, where he will explain his plan to "create an economy that works for all, not just the people on top" (217).

## Analysis

Sanders uses this chapter as an educational preface to his next, much longer chapter dedicated to fixing the American economy. Before Sanders can accurately explain his economic policy ideas, he must educate the reader on what he identifies as the exact





problems in the existing economic system. Wealth and income inequality, unemployment, a lack of oversight in banking and on Wall Street, and an ignorance of workers' rights are all condemned by Sanders as contributors to the deterioration of the middle class. Ultimately, he believes that the decline of the once envied American middle class is the principle problem facing our economy today. His next chapter will outline how to fix the economy.

Sanders expresses concern with not only wealth inequality, but income inequality. He implies that if the pattern of income inequality continues, the overall living conditions for the lower classes will free-fall; lower wages keep the poor exactly where they are on the social and economic ladder, virtually prohibiting any forward mobility. This is "not what America is supposed to be about" (208), and it directly contradicts the prized American dream.

Sanders recalls the decades following the second World War as some of the most prosperous and economically sound years of America's history. He boasts of "factories that actually made things," and massive investments in transportation infrastructure such as highways and airports (208). He notes that as the economy grew, the middle class "shared in the benefits of that growth," a pattern which Sanders hopes to apply to the current economy (209). His campaign platform included both investments in transportation infrastructure and a resurgence of the American manufacturing industry. While these theories worked in the seventies, Sanders fails to mention one of the largest contributors to both manufacturing and transportation: technology. Technological advancements have made leaps and bounds in the past few years alone, never mind 30 plus years. Recycling old government strategies can only be effective if modern cultural and social dynamics are considered. Today, investments in technological manufacturing are more important to western nations than physical manufacturing. Also, technological advancements in travel have changed the workings of the nation's infrastructure. For example, the growth in popularity of electric cars has created a need for charging stations at rest stops and travel centers. While Sanders does not state outright that he thinks these principles should be applied directly, he offers no modern-day connection to the plans he praises so heavily.

Sanders dedicates a discussion in this chapter of the false idea of freedom that has been perpetuated in American history. He blames powerful special interest groups for changing "freedom" to mean little government regulation in business, no oversight of bankers' risky investments, and the ability of millionaires to buy elections (210). Sanders highlights the careless nature of moneyed elites as a genuine threat to the middle class. Even if the correlation is not always clear, he cautions that these dominant special interests are only on the rise at the expense of the middle and lower class who are "working longer hours, sometimes at multiple jobs, for lower wages" (210).

Sanders equates the decline of the middle class with the decline of the "American Dream" (213). He notes patterns in places like Detroit, Baltimore, and rural parts of West Virginia where swarms of poverty, unemployment, and incarceration have replaced once successful industrious communities. He paints a simple picture for the reader to understand the dynamic of economic inequality as it stands today: "the



economic pie keeps getting bigger,” but “the poor and middle class are getting smaller and smaller slices” (217), ultimately meaning that the poor's access to social or economic mobility is nonexistent.

## **Vocabulary**

profoundly, droves, pernicious, gregarious, utopian, unfettered, gaggle



# Ending a Rigged Economy

## Summary

Sanders begins his discussion on repairing the U.S. economy by addressing the need to raise the federal minimum wage. He criticizes the U.S. government's inability to see they have changed the minimum wage to what Sanders calls a "starvation wage" (218). The rising cost of education, health care, and basic goods have trapped minimum wage workers in a cycle of poverty. Sanders suggests that increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour will increase the purchasing power of U.S. citizens, and ultimately stimulate the economy. His belief is that a living wage will also "lead to more social cohesion and a reduction in crime" (228), because more opportunities and less stress will appease the need to commit crimes to survive. Finally, Sanders argues that increasing the federal minimum wage will lead to healthier infants and children as well.

Continuing to advocate for fairness in the workplace, Sanders addresses the gender wage gap and the importance of labor unions before suggesting that the government should apply "real family values" to labor laws (235). He criticizes the Republican ideas of family values such as rejecting contraception and opposing gay rights. On the contrary, his family values are based on paid family and medical leave, paid sick days, and paid vacation time, which he claims are "values every family can believe in" (235).

Improving workers' rights means little if the job market continues at the stagnant rate it is currently in. In the next section of this chapter, Sanders devotes 20 pages to his idea of a functional and prosperous federal jobs program. His job program includes rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, investing in clean energy solutions, repairing the nation's affordable housing system, investing in the nation's schools, and making it easier for Americans to own their own businesses. He goes in depth in each of these areas to describe how his jobs program will stimulate not only the job market, but the economic, social, and overall quality of life for American citizens.

For Sanders, the next crucial element to fixing the nation's economy is achieving real tax reform, which he argues should be "based on the ability to pay" (263). Tax breaks for billionaires and loose tax policies for large corporations are simply not common sense economics. Sanders advocates for stronger regulations on large corporations who evade paying their fair share of taxes by hiding their profits in offshore companies. The tax reform initiative would impact income taxes as well; Sanders suggests progressively rising income taxes for the wealthier earners which would fund a universal Medicare system.

Sanders uses the next section of this chapter to expand on his ideas on trade policies, which he has merely alluded to in previous sections of this book. Sanders blames the decline of the middle class, increase in poverty, and the gap between the rich and poor on recent disastrous trade policies such as NAFTA and PNTR with China. These trade agreements send precious American jobs overseas; Sanders advocates for a "new



trade policy that creates decent-paying jobs in America” instead (280). In order to accomplish this, he suggests ending incentives for corporations such as tax deductions for moving their operations overseas. In a fair society, the government would assist those companies dedicated to keeping jobs in America, not the other way around.

In his final section of this long-winded chapter, Sanders addresses the complex task of reforming Wall Street. First, he identifies the key players on Wall Street and some of the leading banks that have shaped the corrupt economic system in place today. He drops names such as Alan Greenspan, JP Morgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and Citigroup to demonstrate the seemingly perpetual cycle of corporate greed that is sanctioned by the government and paid for by U.S. taxpayers. After identifying the problems on Wall Street, he explains his plan for regulation, which includes ending the too-big-to-fail notion, implementing a twenty-first-century Glass-Steagall Act, reforming credit-checking systems, ending usury, and most importantly, reforming the Federal Reserve. These initiatives revolve around the idea of holding financial institutions accountable for their actions, especially when they affect as many people as they did in 2008.

## Analysis

This chapter is by far the longest of the book, and Sanders’ point is clear: “ending a rigged economy” is his solution to reforming the American political system (218). He uses this 100-page chapter to outline his plan to combat the rigged economy. To begin the discussion, he confronts the issue of raising the federal minimum wage. He uses Walmart as a clear example of the need for a fair living wage; the mega-company has firmly refused to raise their employees’ wages to \$15 per hour, and as such has become “the largest welfare recipient in America” (223). Sanders argues in this section that raising the federal minimum wage will have several beneficial runoff effects: less reliance on welfare, healthier infants and children, a reduced crime rate, and a better standard of living across the social spectrum.

Sanders compares stereotypical Republican “family values” with that of his own “real family values” (235). He argues for paid family and medical leave, paid sick leave, and paid vacation time for all workers to promote healthy families. Sanders praises medical leave programs provided by Japan, Norway, France, Germany, and Canada. In the same fashion as Social Security or Medicare, he proposes the idea of implementing a small tax to guarantee every worker 12 weeks of paid medical leave. Additionally, Sanders understands the importance of vacations to working class families; he again relies on the policies of other developed nations such as Germany and Scandinavia to prove that “vacations reduce stress, strengthen family relationships, increase productivity, and even prevent illness” (241).

Sanders places a sentimental value on work, claiming that a job is more than an income, it is “how we relate to the world in which we live” (241). The physical infrastructure of the world in which we live is rapidly deteriorating, however, due to a chronic lack of funding. Rebuilding infrastructure such as roads, railways, airports, and



broadband systems is the largest focus in his program. Sanders uses a small and relatable annoyance such as traffic to highlight the importance of quality infrastructure in everyday life. Congested highways due to a virtually nonexistent public transit system and poorly maintained roads cause not only frustration, but an increase in fuel spending, an increased environmental hazard, potential injury or death from extended time on the road, and an increase in automotive repair spending. Sanders acknowledges that rebuilding infrastructure is not an interesting issue, but it is necessary and long overdue.

The second largest part of Sanders' federal jobs program is realizing a new business ownership model of employee-owned companies, which he argues are taking a step in the right direction against corporate greed. He praises worker-owned cooperatives across the country in places like Oakland, California and New York City for motivating employees, deterring from absenteeism, increasing employee loyalty, and boosting productivity. In this light, Sanders wants to highlight the overall societal effects of employee-owned companies. Not only would wealth and profits be taken from the handful of wealthy CEOs who control it today, but the trickle-down effects are just as beneficial.

Switching next to tax reform policy, Sanders focuses on both income tax equality and mitigating corporate greed. Throughout his previous policy discussions, Sanders has referenced legislation that he is actively trying to pass, planning to introduced, or has introduced in the past. To demonstrate part of his plan to end corporate greed, he suggests the Corporate Tax Dodging Prevention Act. This legislation would "end the loophole that allows corporations to defer paying taxes on overseas profits," granting the U.S. government billions in tax revenue on a yearly basis (273). Most importantly, the estimated tax revenue would be used to support Sanders' federal jobs programs centered around rebuilding infrastructure. Sanders tax reform initiative is clearly laid out, and offers the reader an entire analysis of the funds that will be rightfully collected and how they will be used to benefit American society.

From tax to trade, Sanders continues to inject meticulous details and a plethora of examples for his plan to end America's rigged economy. His arguments against free trade agreements center around NAFTA, PNTR with China, and the more recent Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). He argues that these issues are never discussed on the main-stream media, even though they affect millions of Americans as manufacturing plants, data collecting centers, and other industries find ways to lower costs by moving operations overseas. The TTP particularly angers Sanders, presumably because of Obama's ability to have stopped it. "NAFTA on steroids," as Sanders titles it, is harmful for a number of reasons, but most importantly because of a provision called the investor-state dispute settlement system (292). This provision allows corporations to sue governments for making legal decisions that prevent their projected profits, a notion Sanders clearly thinks is absurd. In order to make any real progress, in improving the economy or creating a prosperous job market, Sanders argues, trade agreements have to protect American workers instead of displace them.



Reforming Wall Street is admittedly one of the most challenging tasks at hand for Sanders because of the deep intertwining of big money in the political system. Before outlining his idea of a working reform of Wall Street, he explains some of the key players in the financial crisis of 2008. His strategy here is bold, literally; in bold letters, he sections off the names of billionaire bankers who coincidentally have thrown their weight around in the political sphere as either aids or heads of government organizations. He also clearly lists pages worth of fraudulent activity played out by some of the largest financial institutions nationwide such as Bank of America and JP Morgan Chase. Accountability is nonexistent in today's financial sector, so Sanders uses this chapter to hold these careless institutions and bankers accountable.

## Vocabulary

remuneration, squalid, bastion, behemoths, coffers, deleterious, minutiae, imperiled, temerity, eviscerate, acolyte, aberration, shoddy, blithely

# Health Care For All

## Summary

This chapter is used to outline Sanders' opinions on a workable health care system in the U.S. based on a single-payer Medicare program. In recent decades, and especially since the enactment of the Affordable Care Act, health care has been a hot button issue in American politics. In this chapter, Sanders not only defines what is wrong with the current health care system, but offers what he deems a workable plan for a single payer universal health care system.

At the essence of Sanders' argument is the idea that health care is a right, not a privilege or a commodity. Health care is a basic human need that does not discriminate by race, gender, or social status. He criticizes insurance companies and the pharmaceutical industry for allowing the desire for profit override their original directive of maintaining the nation's physical health. This desire for profit has resulted in the U.S. spending the most money on health care than any other nation, despite a constant decline in quality of care. Sanders argues that "we don't need to spend more money on health care. We just need to spend our health care dollars more efficiently" (324).

Within the health care system, Sanders specifically focuses on mental health, growing prescription drug costs, dental care, and improving the nation's health outcomes such as infant mortality rates and life expectancy rates. He also expresses the need for a "healthy society," which, to Sanders, is centered around a myriad of different interconnected dynamics (333). A strong educational system, a clean environment, and equal opportunities for all citizens are all health-related issues.

Sanders concludes this chapter with the platform of his Medicare for all, single payer system for universal health care. He originally proposed this legislation as part of his presidential campaign, and continues to champion it today. The legislation introduces a simple single payer design which would be funded by a proposed income tax. Sanders lays out his tax plan which prioritizes equality and forces corporations to pay their fair share of taxes.

## Analysis

At first the length of this chapter seems indicative of its importance. The previous chapter discussing reforming the U.S. economy consisted of exactly 100 pages, while Sanders devotes a mere 20 in this chapter to his health care plans. However, this is the first time in the book he has delved into his health care reform policies at any length, and he provides an impressive amount of detail.

Sanders uses the mounting administrative costs that hospitals face as an example of the complicated nature of the health care industry. Piles of paperwork, fighting with insurance companies, and receiving pamphlet-sized bills in the mail are grievances the



reader can relate to when imagining their own health care experiences. Sanders argues that these annoyances are also a costly burden on the backs of hospitals, providing the reader with a doubly negative view of the wasteful administrative tasks that accompany a complicated health care system.

Sanders also notes several times that the U.S. spends the most on health care in the entire world. With such a large expenditure, the current state of health care in America should be the envy of the industrialized world. However, it is not, and Sanders attributes this to the failure of the U.S. government to provide universal health care – something every western nation does. Sanders is often criticized for his socialist policy plans being too unrealistic. However, he argues in this chapter that “eliminating the hundreds of billions of dollars in wasteful and unnecessary administrative costs we now spend would free up all the funds we need to provide health care to every American,” in other words, the government needs to re-prioritize the appropriation of health care funds (324).

During his presidential bid, Sanders drafted a Medicare for all, single payer program which he outlines in this chapter as a feasible model for health care reform. This plan highlights the savings that would be felt by both patients and employers, and he suggests an overall simplification of the process that would appeal to most Americans. Most importantly, however, he acknowledges the cost of his program and where these funds would come from. Again, his seemingly lofty ideas are solidified by thorough research and effective tax policies.

## Vocabulary

commodity, corporatized, bureaucracy, demoralizing, irrationality



# Making Higher Education Affordable

## Summary

The next aspect of Sanders' platform discusses the nation's need for affordable access to higher education. Again, Sanders enlists commonsense practices in this chapter to stress the importance of quality and affordable education to American students who are willing and qualified. Like America's health care system, the nation's educational system is simply not up to par with foreign competition. This fear compared with college graduates' crippling amount of debt prompted Sanders to make universal higher education a pillar of his campaign's platform.

Sanders alludes to the profound effect his campaign had on his view of the younger generation. Most of the young people he spoke with were enthusiastic about progressive government reform, yet they had serious concerns about student loan debt, job security, and the overall state of the union. These concerns prompted Sanders to adopt a "revolutionary" policy of universal tuition-free college for all Americans (342). Historically in America, higher education was the "pathway to the middle class," while today it only promises mountains of debt and a guaranteed struggle in an over-saturated job market (344).

Sanders blames the mounting cost of higher education on the administrative costs associated with universities becoming more "corporatized and bureaucratic" (345). This includes the salaries and health care packages for the hordes of useless administrators found in almost all modern universities. High costs are also the result of colleges being run as "businesses competing for market share" (345), which leads to frivolous spending on luxuries such as student centers and sports stadiums instead of students' educations.

Sanders does not only advocate for tuition-free universities, he also realizes the dangers that mounting student debt pose to the economy. College graduates accrue so much debt that they delay other social and economic milestones such as securing a job, marrying, or purchasing a house. This is "slowing overall economic growth," according to Sanders, and poses a threat as serious as the collapse of the housing market in 2008 (346). In addition, his plan offers financial support to low-income students who show academic potential but are statistically at a higher rate of dropping out. Sanders finalizes his plan and this chapter by addressing the need for improvements at the primary and secondary school levels to sufficiently prepare students to perform well at the college level.

## Analysis

Emphasis on education is nothing new for politicians, but Sanders takes it to a "revolutionary and transformative" level by suggesting universal tuition-free college



(342). He continues to stress his underlying theme that most of society's problems are interconnected, and real change must include all facets of the population. Education is society's "great equalizer," meaning it is how we advance and evolve as a nation (343). Therefore, government cannot continue to ignore the crippling costs associated with higher education. In order for the nation to succeed, government must take responsibility for the quality of education provided to its students.

Once he recognized his surprising support from the younger generation, Sanders capitalized and made affordable higher education one of his campaign promises. He relied heavily on young people throughout his campaign to effectively use social media to spread his message, and his support from young people was far greater than any other candidate. Sanders' opponents criticized his popularity among younger voters as a testament to young peoples' dependence on government assistance and their lack of work ethic; however, Sanders describes the nations' youth in a different light, praising their hardworking nature and political enthusiasm, while also fighting on behalf of the billions of dollars in student debt currently owed by college graduates.

Sanders' higher education reform plan is far less detailed than his health care or tax reform initiatives. He dedicates most of this chapter to describing the current economic climate for today's college student and recent graduate, noting the costs of textbooks, room and board, and astronomical interest rates on student loans. Unlike his previous chapters, though, there is not a clearly mapped plan indicating the financial and human costs of education reform, suggesting this is more of a back-burner issue for Sanders. Politicians often know exactly how to play their strengths, and Sanders saw his popularity among younger voters as an immediate strength that he capitalized on effectively.

Whether his ideas were genuine or merely talking points, they are nonetheless indicative of the problems in America's education system today. From primary schools to graduate schools, education is perpetually underfunded despite its obvious importance to a cohesive society. Sanders exemplifies the deficiencies in the American school system by referencing the infamous No Child Left Behind Act, and praises recent efforts to move toward a system where schools judge aptitude on a situational basis as opposed to standardized testing. He also points out government's nonsensical policy of not allowing refinancing on student loan interest rates. "Education...is an inherent part of what being a human being is all about," Sanders argues, and in a country as developed as America, "we should be leading the way" in terms of educational abilities and policies (347).

## Vocabulary

placards, equalizer



# Combating Climate Change

## Summary

In a familiar fashion, Sanders begins this chapter by describing the current scientific and political debate surrounding climate change. His conclusion of the scientific argument is simple: all scientists virtually worldwide agree that climate change is real and poses a major threat to the future of humanity. The political debate is much more complex, however; Sanders argues that the U.S. government's inability to acknowledge climate change is evidence of a "corrupt political and campaign finance system" (362).

Before delving into exactly how to combat climate change, Sanders gives the reader a brief history lesson about the excessive use of fossil fuels in the U.S. and the diminishing state of the government's policy toward efficient energy sources. Modern governments' inability to acknowledge climate change and its repercussions are irrational and undemocratic. Sanders goes into detail to explain the runoff effects of climate change, including scarcity of already precious resources, displacement on a mass scale, and imminent warfare. Sanders believes that climate change is America's greatest national security threat.

Sanders' approach to climate change is multi-faceted; it includes promoting energy efficiency, ending subsidies to fossil fuel companies, taxing carbon and methane pollution, banning fracking, banning oil extracting and pipelines, investing in renewable energy, modernizing the energy grid and energy storage capabilities, and creating a global coalition to transform the entire world's energy systems. In a similar fashion to other areas of the book, Sanders goes in depth with each of his initiatives, including their costs, sources of funds, and whom they benefit.

Though the scope of Sanders' plans to combat climate change is large, his underlying argument is that this environmental phenomenon cannot be ignored. The global scientific community has provided citizens and governments alike with the information and proof necessary to make informed decisions about the future of our planet. However, Sanders argues that a government controlled by corporate greed is not subject to scientific proof; the government's inability to act on behalf of the health of the planet and its population is proof of a deteriorating democratic system.

## Analysis

Sanders' main argument in this chapter at first appears radical, but he is effective in rationalizing it. He uses a popular answer he gave in a presidential debate to restate his views on national security: "climate change is our nation's greatest national security threat" (360). While national security traditionally begets images of terrorism and health pandemics, Sanders sees climate change as the only threat that "cannot be thwarted by good intelligence work," and a threat with "no vaccine or treatment" (360). In other



words, Sanders stresses the need for a bipartisan, even global, effort to combat climate change for the simple facts that the danger is real, the effects will be disastrous, and the government has access to all the available scientific information and solutions to combating the problem. Again, Sanders imposes common sense practices to his political ideology; he suggests that if the U.S. were truly democratic, then when citizens “want something to happen, and science tells them that they are right in wanting it,” their government would act (362).

Sanders blames the greed of tycoons of the oil industry for the government’s continued ignorance of climate change. Billions of dollars in campaign donations have corrupted the modern political system to bend to the will of the oil industry, Sanders writes. Sanders criticizes the Koch brothers, specifically, for going as far as creating groups dedicated to lobbying for climate change denial and calling them think tanks. The Kochs have been effective in their efforts to purchase the political system, Sanders writes, which is evident through their ability to manipulate many Republicans to deny verified and researched science. Sanders lumps Republicans’ climate change ideology together with that of greedy corporate interests, forcing the reader to look at the larger societal picture at play. The reality Sanders is trying to project is that the infamous top one percent in America have “deliberately chosen to put their profits ahead of the health of our people and planet” (363).

Sanders believes promoting energy efficiency is the easiest, cheapest, and most effective first step the U.S. government could take in the global fight against climate change. As quickly as the nation must promote clean energy, it must take steps to wean dependency on fossil fuels. Sanders aims to achieve this by ending direct subsidies of oil companies, which would effectively save taxpayers billions over the next decade. Sanders makes a seemingly distant problem such as climate change and oil industry taxation relatable by reminding the reader the overall taxpayer savings in the long run.

Another crucial step in promoting energy efficiency is modernizing transportation infrastructure to decrease the amount of emissions coming from cars on the roadways. Sanders focuses on the environmental benefits of modernizing transportation infrastructure to demonstrate the dynamic relationship of seemingly distant political issues - jobs and climate change. Reflecting on Sanders’ earlier discussion on creating jobs, he suggested investing in infrastructure as a key component to his federal job initiative. Therefore, not only would modernizing transportation infrastructure promote energy efficiency, it would also create jobs. Throughout this chapter, Sanders is effective in both describing the interconnected nature of society, and demonstrating that his political initiatives are equally as dynamic as society.

## Vocabulary

swaths, dengue

# Real Criminal Justice Reform

## Summary

Sanders begins this chapter by reminding the reader that his presidential campaign stood for “all of us standing together, as one nation, to demand a better life for all” (375). The only way to accomplish this is to address one of America’s most embarrassing yet prominent stains: racism. Sanders relates the perpetuation of slavery in America’s history is indicative of how the criminal justice system is run today; those groups who were traditionally slaves are now the most highly incarcerated. While he is sure to praise the advancements the states of civil rights, criminal justice, and racism, he notes there is still much work to be done.

Sanders’ focuses regarding criminal justice reform include ending police brutality, ending private prisons, confronting mental health, ending the war on drugs, and most importantly, ending structuralized racism. When describing the scope of these issues, Sanders alludes frequently to tragedies prevalent in the mainstream news over the past few years including incidents of police brutality caught on camera and shared online. Combined with the historically racially charged war on drugs, Sanders concludes that African Americans in this nation are subject to higher incarceration rates as well as longer sentences than non-minorities who commit the same crime. He recognizes that the government has perpetuated racism through policy and ignorance, and he suggests a list of initiatives to change this pattern.

Sanders’ criminal justice reform initiatives are heavily focused on retraining and restructuring police forces across the nation. As opposed to investing more and more money into housing inmates, Sanders suggests a course of action that prevents over-arresting nonviolent offenders, drug addicts, and the mentally ill. This starts with police training that includes how to identify warning signs of drug abuse or mental health issues, and includes the implementation of drug courts, rehabilitation programs, and proper mental health facilities. To Sanders, America is one of the leading nations in many aspects, but should not be leading the world in number of incarcerated people per-capita.

## Analysis

Interestingly, Sanders begins this chapter not with a history or analysis of America’s criminal justice system, but instead with a discussion on the prevalence of racism in America. With no transition, he jumps from racism to the explaining the key factors of his criminal justice reform initiatives: police department reform, ending the war on drugs, ending structuralized racism, and reforming the way the nation deals with mental health. Then, in the final section of the chapter, Sanders specifically details his plan for reform. This structure is different from other chapters, where a history or analysis of the topic is discussed, Sanders lists his specific plan, then goes into detail explaining the initiatives.



Beginning with a vague topic such as racism suggests that Sanders visualizes America's broken criminal justice system as a physical manifestation of racism.

Each section of this chapter reflects Sanders' view that the criminal justice system disproportionately targets minorities, specifically African Americans. While he attempts to draw examples of Latino and Native American statistics, his discussion is highly focused on the black community. For example, his first two sections, dedicated to police brutality and the war on drugs, are generally understood in society as issues plaguing black communities. It is important to keep in mind the groups that Sanders may be trying to win support from in this book. The black community has historically been behind the Clintons, which was evident in Sanders' presidential campaign. It is possible this section is strategically used to appeal to African American voters for future campaigns or initiatives.

In the most important section of this chapter, Sanders analyzes the "impacts of institutional and structural racism," which he explains by citing MLK Jr.'s idea that America has "socialism for the rich, rugged individualism for the poor" (384). His breakdown in this section of population percentages, income rates, poverty rates, and unemployment rates is extremely in-depth and impressive. Many times, the problem with politicians reciting statistics is that they do not show a comprehensive view of a pattern. Sanders prevents this by including nationwide statistics as well as state and regional breakdowns of economic and racial patterns.

What is interesting about the list of reform initiatives Sanders provides is that there is virtually no cost attached to them. A redistribution of funds in most cases is sufficient for Sanders' reform plans. To reduce the number of incarcerated persons, Sanders suggests easing penalties on drug crimes and finding sufficient care for the mentally ill. The subsequent money saved would be used to fund police retraining programs that would ultimately reorient the way the criminal justice system works. Many of Sanders' initiatives require no cost, but instead suggest a restructuring of officers' and courts' thinking about incarceration. Overall, the cost of "prevention of crime is a much worthier approach than punishment" (387).

## Vocabulary

intractable



# Immigration Reform Now

## Summary

Sanders uses this chapter as a call for a comprehensive and fair immigration reform plan which would “provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living in the shadows” (390). His reform also aims to keep families together and promote fair labor practices for undocumented immigrants. Not only are undocumented immigrants a vital part of the U.S. labor market, Sanders argues they contribute to the nation’s tax revenue as well. If naturalized, these workers would contribute an additional estimated \$2 billion per year in state and local tax contributions. He also argues that any comprehensive approach to protecting laborers’ rights must include protecting undocumented workers from starvation wages and slave-like conditions, simply due to their large role in the labor market.

Sanders believes it is the responsibility of the government to protect undocumented workers from greedy corporate business owners, many of whom actively persuade undocumented immigrants to work for them. In corporate America, bottom-line is everything, and low-wage workers are a precious commodity. Sanders argues that if the business community is going to continue to exploit illegal immigrants, the government must address not only the legal status of the workers but the exploitation itself. Sanders aims to hold corporations more accountable by forcing them to pay fair wages, and not allowing them to take advantage of loopholes that allow for the calculated employment of undocumented migrants.

While the chapter thus far has delved into Sanders’ observations of immigration, the final pages of this chapter are dedicated to Sanders’ specific plans for achieving immigration reform. Some of these initiatives include simplifying the naturalization process, a sweeping amnesty of all undocumented immigrants who work, attend college, or serve in the military, and a modernization of technology used at U.S. borders. Sanders sticks to his theme of injecting morality into politics by stating immigration reform is only possible with “strong moral leadership” (403) which he feels confident he can provide.

## Analysis

One of Sanders’ first arguments is that without the labor of illegal immigrants, the nation’s agricultural system would ultimately fail. Interestingly, he is employing the same detested too-big-to-fail ideology as the large banks on Wall Street did during the financial crisis. While large banks were directly subsidized by the government, illegal immigrants pose an indirect financial and social strain on the U.S. government which Sanders does not address in this chapter. However, he does employ a solid framework for approaching immigration reform in a moral fashion.



It could be argued that this is yet another chapter where Sanders is attempting to win the support of a demographic he struggled with during his campaign. The vocabulary in this chapter is far more ornate than the rest of the book, and most of it reads similar to a campaign speech. Like previous chapters, Sanders delves into the history and current context of immigration, but in this particular chapter this section is much larger than the space he devotes to actual immigration reform initiatives. He also criticizes Donald Trump several times throughout this chapter, presumably because immigration reform was one of Trump's most contentious issues and, therefore, one of the easiest for Sanders to oppose.

One of Sanders most convincing arguments in this chapter is made on behalf of refugee populations seeking asylum in America, specifically from Central America. He criticizes the government for lumping refugees into the same category as illegal immigrants, and proposes a system that houses refugees away from prisoners until they can be vetted for and safely integrated into American society. To the same tune, Sanders criticizes the devastating social and economic impact that trade agreements such as NAFTA and CAPTA have had on Mexican and Central American societies. Many of the runoff effects of the trade agreements are adding to gross levels of corruption and displacing lower-class Central American citizens, sending millions of refugees illegally into America. Sanders is skilled in demonstrating the dynamic nature of society, effectively showing the reader the impact of poor trade agreements on lower-class Central Americans in the same fashion that they have left American workers jobless.

Sanders concludes this chapter by providing a laundry list of what "immigration reform must" (400) entail, but provides little explanation for each proposed initiative. His laundry list focuses on the general themes of global inequality exacerbated by poor trade deals, the importance of keeping families together, the need for immigration reform policies to reflect the importance of immigrant workers, and allowing immigration authorities to focus on violent offenders who pose a threat to society instead of innocent workers or refugees. His plans are broad and ideological rather than factual and surrounded with supporting data, leading to two presumptions: either Sanders has not developed as in-depth of a plan for immigration reform as he has for tax reform, or this is an emotional issue rather than an arguable or objective issue.

## Vocabulary

virulently, tenor, vitriol, demagoguery, unscrupulous





# Protecting Our Most Vulnerable

## Summary

From the outset of his book, Sanders has mentioned his passion in advocating for the nation's most vulnerable populations. In this chapter, he addresses the problems in some of today's vulnerable populations, which he identifies as those living in poverty, children, senior citizens, veterans, Native Americans, and the disabled. He observes that the U.S. government's "priorities have become horribly distorted," with wealth and profit overriding the well-being of the nation's children (407). He quotes one of his inspirations, Franklin Delano Roosevelt in saying "the test of our progress is...whether we provide enough for those who have little" (404). In Sanders' eyes, America is not progressing in providing for its poor.

Sanders has always been a staunch defender of Social Security, which he expands upon in this chapter. Millions of senior citizens as well as disabled citizens depend on Social Security as their sole source of income, yet Republicans have consistently tried to strip deserving Americans of this program. Those at the opposite end of the age spectrum are also among Sanders' most vulnerable: the almost 20% of American children living in poverty. Also among the nation's most vulnerable are veterans and the Native American population. Sanders' argues for a more comprehensive approach to veterans' care, stating that it is simply a "cost of war" (416). He finalizes his descriptions of America's most vulnerable by touching on Native Americans' rights, which have been perpetually marginalized by the government for hundreds of years.

Sanders concludes this chapter with an outline of what actions need to be taken to help the most vulnerable populations in the nation. This can also be read as an outline of most of his political platform. While this final section does not go into detail about specific policies, it encapsulates the driving morals behind his policies. He provides a series of ideas beginning with "we must end," followed by the injustices facing the most vulnerable Americans, signifying a call to action for Americans to take it upon themselves to create a truly representative government (419).

## Analysis

Sanders has a traditional view of government in the sense that he believes it should act on behalf of its people, especially its suffering people. For Sanders, it is not about big government or small government, it is about a moral government. Morality includes helping those without the means to help themselves, such as the poor, children, and senior citizens among other groups. He quotes two of his biggest inspirations, Pope Francis and FDR, to solidify his theme of morality; the two iconic historical figures value the needs of the suffering as much as Sanders. He notes that today, American leaders must make the same decisive action as FDR in executing New Deal policies.



Sanders makes the claim that “poverty is truly a death sentence” for a growing number of Americans (408). Limited access to food, growing housing prices, and little access to health care plague poverty-stricken communities and are effectively lowering some communities’ life expectancy rates. Sanders provides a list of grievances he heard at a town hall event in Iowa to personify the political issue of poverty. He describes a single working mother struggling to afford a quality life for her children, a diabetic man incapable of affording his insulin, and a disabled homeless veteran unable to access care through the government he fought to protect. These are the people Sanders believes the reader can relate to in personifying the struggle of poverty.

This chapter arguably provides the reader with an overall outline of Sanders’ political platform. The most vulnerable of Americans are the ones to whom he has devoted entire chapters of this book. Here, he boils down his large ideas to simplify his ideology; all his initiatives center around the basic principle that government’s primary directive is to care for its most vulnerable populations. He uses the final section of this chapter to merge all his ideas into a cohesive call to action for the American government. He stresses the need to “end the incredible despair” that leads to poverty, “alleviate the pain” of those living on starvation wages, and ensure quality of life to veterans, senior citizens, and the disabled (419). His call to action focuses on morality; it is imperative of American voters to “create a responsive government that works for all the people, not just the few at the top” (419).

## Vocabulary

ramshackle



# Corporate Media and the Threat to our Democracy

## Summary

Sanders argues in this chapter that America's corporate media system is filled with conflicts of interest. He explains the prevalence of corporate media in American's everyday lives; media has a massive say in which products consumers buy, which advertisements they see, and which national issues they are encouraged to think about. Sanders believes this concentration of the sources of information poses a threat to American democracy, in the sense that there is no coverage of major issues such as climate change, poverty, or income inequality on the mainstream media. The problems that haunt everyday citizens are of no interest to the corporate media.

He claims to have learned the true scope of corporate media control through his experiences on the campaign trail. He lists various instances where he held meaningful discussions with concerned citizens about the issues of income inequality, poverty, and Native Americans' rights, yet received little to no attention from the mainstream media. Compared to Clinton and the Republican candidates, Sanders received virtually no face-time on the national media stage. The bits of speeches and rallies that happened to make their way to the larger networks were reduced to snippets of Sanders' remarks on Clinton, or on anything other than the issues at hand. Sanders lists these examples to demonstrate how he experienced first-hand the corporate stronghold over the media.

Sanders concludes this chapter by quoting a [FreePress.net](http://FreePress.net) study detailing some of the nation's most powerful billionaires and their corporate holdings. He focuses on the six corporations that together own 90% of all media outlets: Comcast, Disney, News Corp, Time Warner, Viacom, and CBS. These corporations have holdings in several different industries, control an overwhelming amount of wealth, and undoubtedly use their influence to protect their interests and further their agendas.

## Analysis

Until this part of the book, Sanders' ideas are extremely cohesive. Each chapter explained a principle or initiative that Sanders' alluded to previously and frequently throughout his book. This chapter is interesting, however, because it is Sanders' first mention of the corporate media. He argues that the topics the media covers are not as important as the topics they do not cover. While he has always known this fact, he presents corporate media bias as a lesson learned through his presidential campaign, which is presumably why it is placed at the end of his book. It seems as if a third section to the book could start with this chapter, one in which Sanders described all the lessons learned throughout his campaign experience.



Sanders both opens and closes this chapter reciting a quote from A.J. Liebling, stating “freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one” (420). Today, this means that a handful of powerful corporations are the only ones who possess freedom of speech. He reinforces this ideology by first detailing his experiences with corporate media on the campaign trail, and then proving the reader with a list compiled by Freepress.net of the six corporations that own 90% of the American media. The danger of such a small portion of wealthy individuals controlling the media is parallel to the dangers of a small portion of individuals controlling most of the nation’s wealth; greed becomes the main motivator, as real issues that Americans care about are brushed aside.

Along the campaign trail, Sanders’ grassroots popularity soared, while the attention paid to him by the media was virtually non-existent. He believes his problem in this respect was his commitment to the real issues facing the working and middle classes, something “fairly irrelevant” to the billionaire-controlled media (424). Inspired by ratings and greed, the corporate media often reports on presidential elections as if they are “a game show, a baseball game, a soap opera, or a series of conflicts,” pushing the issues facing the nation aside, Sanders writes (424).

Sanders concludes this chapter by providing the reader with a list of the six corporations which control 90% of American media: Comcast, Disney, News Corp, Time Warner, Viacom, and CBS. While this section is lengthy and somewhat repetitive, it is nonetheless eye-opening. The profits seen by these companies are beyond average citizens’ comprehension, creating a clear disconnect between the owners of mainstream media and the needs of the population. It is also interesting to see just how far the reach of these corporations go, and to see recognizable names of television stations and news outlets grouped together under the same ownership. Sanders believes freedom of the press “is the essence of democracy,” but the control of almost all American media by the wealthy few is a serious threat to the future of democracy (444).

## Vocabulary

rapt, ingratiate, abrogated, opined



# Important People

## Bernie Sanders

The author and subject of this book, Bernie Sanders is a long-time Independent Senator from Vermont, who was recently thrust into the national spotlight after a surprisingly successful presidential campaign that focused on grassroots politics and defeating the political establishment. Seen at first as a fringe candidate who had no shot in securing the Democratic nomination, Sanders put up an impressive fight against long-time Party favorite Hillary Clinton. He documents his childhood, political life, and campaign for the presidency in the first part of his book, saving the second half to present his political agenda had he been elected president.

Before attempting his run for the presidency, Sanders was the longest-sitting Independent ever in Congress. He has wholeheartedly supported a number of key issues since the inception of his political ideology, such as income inequality, climate change, civil rights, poverty, seniors' issues, and veterans' care. He took these issues to the national stage, where he was met with little support in Washington but an overwhelming amount of grassroots support. Most interestingly, his campaign raised millions of dollars from not a single large donor; most of Sanders' campaign donations averaged around \$25. He is proud to have fought visibly for real campaign finance reform. By the end of his campaign, Sanders was holding rallies with attendance in the 20-thousands. Though he was unable to defeat Hillary Clinton in the race for the Democratic nomination, he was impressed by the desire for a political revolution throughout the country.

## Jane O'Meara Sanders

Jane O'Meara Sanders is Sanders' current wife and one of his most trusted political advisers. He speaks little of their personal life, focusing on her influence in his campaign instead. Jane's decision to hold Sanders' campaign announcement speech at Lake Chaplain is one of his first references to her involvement: "Jane prevailed" in choosing the venue not only for its beauty, but for the importance it had in Sanders' political life in Vermont (113). His choice to leave his family out of the book for the most part seems calculated, as to not infringe too heavily on his personal life.

## Hillary Rodham Clinton

Hillary Clinton was, to Sanders, "the most powerful political machine" and had "the most powerful fund-raising system" in the country (129). He notes that by the time he announced his campaign, Clinton had already received tens of millions in donations. In terms of physically campaigning against a seasoned veteran in the political sphere, Sanders did not fare so well. His appearance was disheveled, he did not look as presidential as Clinton, and his speeches were often erratic. Nonetheless, Sanders felt



confident that his views and judgement surpassed Clinton's, though his experience did not.

While Sanders prides himself on never running a negative advertisement, he is very critical of Clinton in this book. His largest criticism of both Hillary and Bill Clinton was their alignment with big money interests. Sanders claims "you cannot take on the establishment when you take their money," ultimately stating the Clintons were too far removed from the average citizen to be an honest representative of the American people (51). He also criticizes Clinton's record of waiting to make important decisions or take a stand on pressing issues. For example, when debating the Keystone Pipeline, Clinton remained silent, causing Sanders to claim "you could be for it, you could be against it, but you had to take a stand on one of the most important environmental issues of our time" (144). He believes his responsiveness and dedication to a core set of principles makes him a better presidential candidate than Hillary Clinton.

## **President Barack Obama**

President Barack Obama is presented in an interesting light in Sanders' book. While Sanders spends a lot of time criticizing the establishment, he does not go as far to attack President Obama or his administration. Instead, he focuses mainly on Republican establishment politics. One of the first mentions he makes of the then-sitting President is that his campaign drew heavily from Obama's, due in part to Obama's progressive politics. He praises Obama's utilization of "social media for communication and fund-raising," as well as his use of "large and effective rallies," for providing some of the framework for Sanders' own campaign (94).

## **Pope Francis**

It is clear throughout the entirety of his book that Sanders draws heavily on Pope Francis for inspiration. Despite being raised in a Jewish family, Sanders frequently quotes the leader of the Catholic church on issues such as climate change, income inequality, and poverty. Sanders attempts to inject the theme of morality into his political ideology, and he does so in this book by referencing Pope Francis. During a speech at a fundamentalist Catholic university, Sanders quotes the Pope's claim that "the current financial crisis originated in a profound human crisis," and that "there is a need for financial reform along ethical lines" (151). Sanders praises the Pope's call for a "moral economy," and states outright that he is "a big fan of Pope Francis and strongly support his call for radical changes in international economic priorities" (177). This line of thinking solidifies the global need for fair and honest governments to perpetuate fair and honest economies that work for all people, not just the wealthy few.

Sanders presents Pope Francis' ideology not as that of a great religious leader, but that of a great moral leader. The Catholic church and its leadership are frequently criticized for their complete opposition to any progressive ideals, but Pope Francis is working to change that. Sanders even notes the Pope's ability to weigh in on issues traditionally



not touched by the Catholic church; among these issues is climate change, which Sanders quotes the Pope saying "the world is on a suicide course with regard to climate change" (361). Sanders also uses the words of Pope Francis to support his claim that corporate media has their priorities mixed up: "How can it be that it is not a news story when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?" he asks (409).

## **Franklin Delano Roosevelt**

Throughout his description of the campaign trail and the presentation of his political agenda, Sanders alludes to one of his biggest political inspirations, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Sanders relates the conditions felt by Americans due to the Recession of 2008 with those felt during the Great Depression. Though he admits the nation is better off today than in the throes of the Depression, Sanders believes some of FDR's ideals can be applied to present-day politics. He frequently quotes FDR's ideas of what should lay at the center of a cohesive society: "true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence," supporting Sanders theme of wealth and income inequality (242). When summarizing his political agenda, Sanders once again quotes Roosevelt's ideas on inequality: "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have little" (404).

## **Charles and David Koch**

Infamously known as the Koch brothers, this political powerhouse of a family is the second wealthiest in America. Sanders places them at the forefront of "the oligarchic movement" (197). Their investments in oil have prompted them to protect their assets by purchasing a Republican government that will guarantee limited regulation on their lucrative industry. In 2016 alone, Sanders reports that the Kochs intend to spend \$750 million during the election cycle, "more money than either the Democratic National Committee or the Republican National Committee will spend" (198). One of the main goals of the Koch brothers, and one of Sanders' biggest problems with modern politics, is the absurd spending that essentially dictates who will win an office. Campaign finance reform was one of Sanders' most touted themes throughout his campaign, and removing the influence of wealthy capitalists such as the Koch brothers is the first step to achieving real reform.

## **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Sanders was highly involved with student activism groups during his years at the University of Chicago. While there, he participated in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, led by the infamous Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose life's work of "taking on the establishment" continues to inspire Sanders (21). The leadership Dr. King



demonstrated not only for civil rights, but for overall equality, helped to point Sanders down the political path he is currently on.

Dr. King was clear about his views on poverty and inequality. Sanders quotes a speech given by King in which he categorizes the two different Americas that economic inequality has created: one "is flowing with the milk of prosperity and the honey of equality," while the other "has a daily ugliness about it that transforms the buoyancy of hope into the fatigue of despair" (384). Sanders recognizes King's observation was structural in the sense that the government perpetuated "socialism for the rich," and "rugged individualism for the poor" (384).

## Larry Sanders

Larry Sanders is Bernie's older brother, whom he does not mention much in this book. Early on, however, he credits Larry with introducing him to politics and reading. "He was a good teacher, and opened my eyes to so much," Sanders recalls after his brother established a book shelf in their home (9). Seemingly on purpose, Sanders does not mention his family members much. He is clear, however, that Larry was his mentor.

## Jack Welsh

Though only few references are made about Jack Welsh in this book, he is used as a profound example of Sanders' view of capitalism. Welsh is the former CEO of General Electric, and Sanders criticizes him for outsourcing U.S. jobs, cutting employee benefits, and enjoying gross sums in bonuses and gifts for himself. To Sanders, Welsh "represents almost everything that is wrong with contemporary capitalism," excessive greed at the detriment of the hard working masses (260).





# Objects/Places

## Burlington, Vermont

Sanders is enamored with his home state of Vermont, its culture, its people, and its rustic charm. While he preferred living in more secluded towns, he found Burlington to be one of his biggest political opportunities. As mayor of Burlington, Sanders helped transform the city with progressive political initiatives. Burlington is also where, on May 26, 2015, Sanders announced his run for the presidency.

## Chicago, Illinois

Sanders attended the University of Chicago where his political ideology began to take form. He was involved in various student groups and served as a civil rights and anti-war activist. Inspired by his fellow students and activists such as Martin Luther King Jr., Sanders' political mindset was essentially born in Chicago.

## Socialism

While not discussed heavily in his book, one of the most common criticisms of Sanders is his long-standing allegiance to socialism. He calls himself a Democratic Socialist, meaning he advocates for a democratic political system and a socialist economic system. He acknowledges the immediate fear that pops into voters' minds when they hear the word socialism, but he elegantly defends his position throughout his book. One of the demographics Sanders struggled with was seniors; he believes this is because of the negative attributes that were attributed to socialists during the Cold War.

## Citizens United

Citizens United is a conservative Political Action Committee (PAC) which was also the subject in a major Supreme Court ruling in 2008. The ruling allowed virtually unlimited campaign contributions from corporations, effectively making it possible to purchase an election or a candidate. Most presidential candidates today are funded by super PACs, something Sanders sees as the ugliest part of the political process. For Sanders, campaign finance reform starts with repealing Citizens United.

## General Electric

During his presidential campaign, Sanders was asked in an interview to name a corporation that was "destroying the moral fabric of America" (289). Sanders unabashedly named General Electric. GE's pattern of outsourcing low-wage jobs and avoiding paying U.S. taxes were, to Sanders "the epitome of corporate greed and a



model that other companies followed," ultimately creating a new business model for American corporations to strive for (289).

## Wal-Mart

Wal-Mart has become one of America's most recognizable corporate names in a short period of time. In the fight for low-wage workers to earn more than a starvation wage, Sanders and other politicians have called to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. With a CEO earning "more than \$9,000 an hour," it would seem that Wal-Mart is more than capable of raising its wage, but the corporate giant has yet to do so (223). Sanders sees this as a pure example of corporate greed outweighing the desire to help struggling workers.

## Trans-Pacific Partnership

Sanders is a staunch opponent of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and says Barack Obama has been "dead wrong" in supporting it (292). He argues that the very point of trade agreements are to "create good-paying jobs in this country and to lift living standards around the world," the opposite of the real effects of the TPP (295). Realistically, this partnership would be devastating to American jobs, forcing laborers to compete with the bare minimum wages employers can enjoy offshore. It would also "make it easier for multinational corporations to pollute and degrade the environment" (293). Virtually every major environmental organization and every workers' union opposed the TPP, but this overwhelming sentiment did not sway Obama; Sanders believes this is proof of establishment politics getting in the way of what the American people truly want.

## Wall Street

Sanders uses the term Wall Street to encapsulate the entire elite financial establishment in America. He constantly calls for reforming Wall Street or a stricter regulatory hold on Wall Street. In our current state, "Congress does not regulate Wall Street - it is Wall Street that regulates Congress" (297). He believes greedy financial executives have created a "culture of fraud and corruption," through the billions of dollars they have spent lobbying for elected officials to take their side (305). He criticizes the normalization of money laundering, currency manipulation, tax evasion, bribery, conspiracy, and rate tampering that Wall Street has perpetuated, which is adding to the insane levels of income inequality felt today.

## The Corporate Media

Sanders' take on the corporate media is interesting because it is the only section of the book he delivers in pure hindsight. While he knew the extent of the control that a wealthy few have over the media, he learned firsthand during his campaign what that



control really means. Sanders saw his popularity among common citizens soar, but received almost no air time on the major news networks where an overwhelming amount of Americans collect their information. He believes he performed so well among younger voters because of his campaign's effective use of social media to convey their ideas; he was essentially forced to use social media because of the little interest major news networks offered. Sanders believes that in order for a real political revolution to occur, freedom of the press needs to be returned to the masses, not condensed in the hands of a few elite billionaires.

## Oligarchy

One of Sanders' primary complaints with the current political system is the shift from a democracy to an oligarchy. Oligarchy is a "society in which almost all economic and political power rests with a handful of multibillionaire families" (188). The infamous top one percent, who control almost all profit and wealth, are also on a quest to control the government in order to secure their financial superiority. The detrimental flip side to this is that oligarchs tend to further their own gain at the expense of those at the bottom rungs of society. The shift toward an oligarchical government would ensure that millions of middle and lower class Americans would not possess the opportunities to improve their station.



# Themes

## Morality

From the outset of his presidential campaign, Sanders wanted to "inject the radical concept of morality" into his message; though, to him, morality was a "simple, straightforward, honest" way of doing politics (88). Describing this concept as radical is a criticism of the current political system and its players. To Sanders, morality has been missing for far too long from politics. "Is it moral," Sanders asks in a series of rhetorical questions, "that, when our citizens are working longer hours for lower wages, 52 percent of all new income generated is going to the top 1 percent" (89)? Sanders urges that morality is crucial in policy making; caring for working families is an essential duty of government, especially if those working families constitute a majority of the nation's population.

Sanders' moral political platform is rooted in the inspiration he draws from Pope Francis. As one of the "great moral and religious leaders...of modern history," Pope Francis was actively inspiring millions to take a closer look at the issues that seem to be permanently keeping certain demographics at a disadvantage, mainly the poor, unemployed, and the elderly (88). On a global scale, these people were being ignored and politicians were to blame. By emphasizing morality, Sanders attempts to reincorporate these oppressed populations into political discourse. As one of the wealthiest nations in the world, America has the means to provide for its underprivileged populations, but lacks a strong moral leader to push funds in the right- or moral- direction.

The effort would not stop with political reform alone, however. Sanders also emphasizes the need for economic reform on a moral scale. To reinforce this argument, he quotes Pope Francis' call for a "moral economy," one that "addressed the needs of ordinary people and not just capitalist profiteers" (88). It is frequently touted by modern politicians that most of the wealth in the U.S. is controlled by the top one percent of the population. Sanders argued at a conference at the Vatican that people "must reject the framework of this contemporary economy as immoral and unsustainable" (177). Thus, such extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a few greedy corporations and individuals is not the framework for Pope Francis' moral economy.

Even before his chapter dedicated solely to the nation's most vulnerable, Sanders engages in a discussion about who the government is supposed to protect on the basis of morality; "I believe that the government has a moral responsibility to provide for the vulnerable- children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled" (224). Here, Sanders is clearly stating his belief of the very function of government: to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves. Sanders attempts to inject morality into each of his campaign's initiatives, including climate change. He passionately argues that it would be a "moral disgrace" to future generations to not engage in the fight against climate change (355). To Sanders, democracy is inherently moral, and the U.S. needs to find her way back to leading by moral standards.



## The System is Rigged

Sanders devotes this book not to himself, but to a larger progressive political movement which, in order to succeed, must show voters the connection between "the reality of their lives and what government does or does not do" (66). A true representative democracy embodies the morals and concerns of its people, but Sanders claims American democracy is rigged to work in favor of the few at the expense of the many. The economy, the tax system, international trade agreements - Sanders argues that it is all rigged. While it comes off somewhat paranoid at first, Sanders makes detailed arguments for each of his claims that the American political and economic establishment is rigged to benefit the wealthy billionaire class at the expense of the working class. More importantly, many of the reform efforts proposed in his political agenda share the common goal of fixing the current rigged system to work on behalf of Americans, not against them.

During his campaign, Sanders witnessed large levels of low-voter turnout and an overall disinterest in government which leads him to believe that even voters had "concluded that the system is rigged," and thus saw no point in voting (306). He even devotes a 100-page chapter to ending a rigged economy in America, which he believes is crucial in restoring the ideals of democracy. A rigged system, to Sanders, is one that inherently promotes a cycle of inequality. He touches on inequality in every single chapter of this book, primarily when discussing wealth and income inequality; as Sanders is adamant about, however, society is interconnected. Wealth and income inequality contribute to inequalities in access to health care, in the effects of climate change, and in the criminal justice system. The system has been rigged by the nation's wealthy elites to maintain the current levels of inequality, and in many cases are working toward an even more corrupt system by transferring their economic power into political power.

Sanders' proposed reform efforts in such fields as health care and financial regulation were aimed at restoring economic equality, and ultimately ending the rigged system. Though Sanders cannot put his political agenda into full action in his position as Senator, his overall goal for presenting this theme is for the reader to understand the absurd inequality present in the economy, political system, and many other aspects of society. Because he believes a "lack of political consciousness is exactly what the ruling class of this country wants" (66), Sanders' goal is to expose the rigged system to the American people in hopes that they will use their vote to change society.

## Society is Interconnected

At first impression, Sanders' prose seems repetitive, as campaign finance reform is weaved throughout his book, and the effects of poverty are discussed in every single chapter; however, this repetitiveness is a manifestation of Sanders' acknowledgement of a truth that many politicians seem to forget- "everything is related to everything" and "nothing exists in a vacuum" (362). This is why Sanders' chapter on climate change presents some of the same arguments as his chapters on health care or fixing the



economy; the problems facing American society are so deep-rooted and wide-spanning that they cannot be isolated from each other.

Underlying societal issues such as greed, racism, and poverty are the basis of many of the problems facing the nation, but they cannot be combated one at a time. This is why Sanders calls for a political revolution- there are countless areas that need to be reformed and any true change in society must attempt all of these reforms. For example, Sanders relates the rising cost of higher education with the rising cost of college tuition; as universities become more bureaucratic and require more employees, the cost to cover employees' health insurance skyrockets. Furthermore, Sanders deems "a strong educational system, a clean environment, and equal opportunity for everyone regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality" health-related issues (333). The overall health of society is not dependent on physical health alone, but rather a cross-section of many facets of society.

The implications of an interconnected society are devastating for those on the poorer end of the financial spectrum. For example, Sanders reinforces his idea that the government has a responsibility to take care of the poor by explaining the human cost of poverty in every chapter of his book. In his chapter on climate change, Sanders notes that those most affected by a natural disaster are "people who have the fewest resources to protect themselves and the fewest options when disaster strikes" (361). Thus, income inequality and increased cost of health care are leading to an increased rate of poverty, which in turn leads to more physical and human damage that is likely to occur in the event of a natural disaster or global health epidemic. To Sanders, reforming America had to truly encompass all of America- from schools, to seniors' care, to rebuilding infrastructure, all the way to ensuring universal health care.

One of Sanders' major downfalls during his campaign was the little attention paid to him by the mainstream media. When he was asked to give brief segments for various news outlets about the current issue of the day, he noted that "in a complicated world, I find it very hard to respond to the issue of the day in twenty seconds or less" (424). Sanders argues the mainstream media does not embrace the complicated nature of American society, but rather it focuses on sensational stories that earn ratings. The complicated American societal dynamic is something Sanders consistently references, and finds himself rather comfortable with. He believes this understanding of the nature of society makes him an ideal leader.

## **The "Establishment"**

One of Sanders' goals is to expose corruption and inequality in all aspects of society, which he does by recognizing the nature of establishment politics. From the outset of his campaign, he understood that he was faced with the daunting task of "taking aim at the nation's entire political and financial establishment" (129). While he never explicitly defines the establishment, the reader is led to believe it is almost the entirety of the political system- from elected officials, to staff, campaign donors, think tanks, and any candidate who has given in to the temptation of big moneyed interests. Sanders argues



that the current establishment has solidified and perpetuated massive levels of inequality; essentially, the establishment is the name Sanders gives to the above mentioned rigged system.

Sanders' first reference to the establishment in this book comes when recalling the deep impression Martin Luther King Jr. had on his political ideology. He praises King for "taking on the entire establishment," exemplified by King's dedication to not only civil rights, but also income inequality, fair wages, and poverty (21). Thus, while the establishment is a loaded term, it essentially encompasses the long-standing political status quo that Sanders, like King, believes is hurting the American people. Sanders' political agenda (the second half of his book) is a manifestation of his promise to fight against the establishment- he proposes reforms for a wide array of social and economic problems which all interconnect to reform society, and the establishment, as a whole.

Sanders believes his political journey is profoundly different from other politicians, because he "started way, way outside of establishment politics" (25). Sanders makes the point over and over again throughout his book that he is not a career politician in the typical sense; though he has dedicated a lifetime of service to politics, he has always maintained a progressive ideology that tries its best to align with the people Sanders represents. Sanders' problem with establishment politicians is that they get too caught up in the convoluted political establishment that exists today, whereas Sanders believes he has escaped this cycle. His position outside of the establishment makes him the ideal candidate to ignite his proposed political revolution.

## Legislative Accomplishments or Ideas

Sanders admits outright that there is an overwhelming lack of interest in the political system sweeping America today. Sanders takes small steps to combat this, including interjecting his legislative initiatives throughout this book. Almost every chapter includes an example of legislation that Sanders has either introduced himself as a Senator or helped to author with colleagues. By continuously interjecting his legislative achievements and proposals, Sanders is attempting to appeal to those who have lost faith or interest in politics. In his experience, when people see their government actively working in their favor, they come out in numbers to support it. Therefore, Sanders casually mentions many of his proposals in hopes the reader will recognize his efforts to be a voice of the people in need. A few examples include: the Clean Energy Worker Just Transition Act, the Corporate Tax Dodging Prevention Act, and the Climate Protection and Justice Act.

It is through the interjection of his various political accomplishments that Sanders incorporates all of the previously described themes. Sanders' politics at an ideological level value action more than talk, thus, it makes sense he would use his legislative endeavors as physical proof of the foundations of his platform. For example, the Corporate Tax Dodging Prevention Act would end corporations' ability to evade taxes by sheltering profits overseas. The resulting tax revenue could be essential in any of Sanders' proposed programs, such as rebuilding infrastructure or ensuring universal



access to health care. Asking wealthy corporations to pay their fair share in taxes to the country that has provided them with immense opportunity is more than a commonsense argument, it is a moral argument. Sanders claims large corporations' long-standing ability to exploit tax loopholes is an example of a financial establishment, thus confirming his theme of fighting the establishment. Finally, Sanders' social reform initiatives are far-reaching, but expensive. Thus, his ability to gain tax revenue in a fair way and distribute the funds to beneficial programs is an example of society's interconnected nature.



# Styles

## Structure

Sanders breaks this book into two distinct sections, one detailing his presidential campaign, and the other outlining the components of his proposed political revolution. The structure of Sanders' book is similar to that of his politics - messy and spontaneous. There is seemingly no correlation between the lengths of the chapters, with his longest reaching 100 pages and his shortest at just 12 pages. Some chapters are carefully organized using subsections, headings, and lists, but his system is far from scientific. The second section of his book essentially looks like a page out of Sanders' personal journal, with a vague organizational system in place.

The first section, named *Running For President*, is a semi-autobiographical and semi-chronological account of all the aspects Sanders believes shaped his political identity. He very briefly documents his childhood in Brooklyn, education in Chicago, and political life in Vermont and Washington leading up to his decision to run for president. This work is only semi-autobiographical because Sanders focuses more effort describing the tough decision to run for president than he does his personal life. While the entire book is written in first-person, Sanders goes to great lengths to briefly mention and thank his family members, but keeps the majority of the book about his politics.

Sanders named his second section *An Agenda for a New America: How We Transform our Country*, and an agenda is exactly what he presents. Almost two-thirds larger than the first section, this section outlines what a Sanders' administration would accomplish for America. Essentially, this chapter is a playbook for Sanders' political initiatives, with a plethora of observations, evidence, and research surrounding all of his proposals. His organizational methods could be more systematic, but he provides a basic outline, complete with page breaks and headings, to make his extensive proposals easier to digest.

## Perspective

Sanders attempts at certain parts of his book to employ an objective perspective, but that is almost impossible in politics. The American political system is ingrained in an 'us v. them' mentality, which Sanders tries to avoid by refraining from negative TV ads or addressing his opponents' character. However, the essence of political dialogue is inherently subjective, and Sanders cannot help but fall into this perspective as well. Sanders uses the adjective 'commonsense' several times throughout his book when trying to employ an objective perspective.

## Tone

One of Sanders' strengths among voters was his transparency and honesty. He prides himself for writing all of his speeches and being able to expand on his beliefs at any given time, without a carefully choreographed rehearsal first. This translates to his writing as well; Sanders often repeats the same phrasing throughout his book, and he also offers purely opinionated interjections. These strategies confirm to the reader Sanders' dedication to his subject matter. The text does not come across as carefully polished and politically correct, but instead it reads effortlessly as either a political speech or an excerpt from Sanders' personal writings all the way through.

## Quotes

Republicans win elections when voter turnout is low and their big-money friends spend a fortune on ugly TV ads. Democrats win elections when ordinary people are excited, involved in the political process, and come out to vote.

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 1, Chapter 3 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This bold statement from Sanders offers the reader an example of one of the many criticisms Sanders has of the Republican party. This statement is particularly important because Sanders has identified as an Independent his entire political career, yet obviously aligns significantly more with Democrats.

I wanted to put energy, spontaneity, and messiness back into the political process, not just a well-choreographed set of productions or 'listening tours' carefully made for TV.

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 1, Chapter 4 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This quote encapsulates Sanders' main problem with establishment politics. Carefully rehearsed political performances are detrimental to the essence of democracy, because of a lack of transparency. Sanders believes politicians should address the real issues with real citizens.

And to those who say we cannot restore the [American] dream, I say just look at where we are standing. This beautiful place was once an unsightly rail yard that served no public purpose and was an eyesore. As mayor, I worked with the people of Burlington to help turn this waterfront into the beautiful people-orientated spot it is today. We took the fights to the court, to the legislature, and we won.

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 1, Chapter 5 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote is evidence of Sanders' use of his waterfront beautification efforts as mayor of Burlington as a metaphor for his potential as president.

I also challenged Clinton for refusing to take a stand on the Keystone Pipeline, which would transport some of the dirtiest fuel on the planet. You could be for it, you could be against it, but you had to take a stand on one of the most important environmental issues of our time.

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 1, Chapter 6 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This quote represents the essence of Sanders' ideal political system. Elected officials must make knowledgeable decisions in their constituents' best interest; it is the definition of a representative democracy. Politicians must take action, instead of playing the political game as he accuses Clinton of doing.

I'm not personally involved with politics, but he changed my mind because he addressed the issues I actually care about.

-- Michaila Konig Taylor, attended Sanders' rally (Section 1, Chapter 6 paragraph 4)



**Importance:** This quote from a Seattle, Washington student provides the reader with a glimpse into the younger generations' support of Sanders.

Democracy is about one person, one vote. It's about all of us coming together to determine the future of our country. It is not about a handful of billionaires buying elections, or governors suppressing the vote by denying poor people or people of color the right to vote. Our job is to stand together to defeat the drift toward oligarchy and create a vibrant democracy.

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 2, Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote is the very first line of Section 2 of Sanders' book, which outlines his plans for an ideal American government system. It is also the only bold text in the chapter, making it clear Sanders wants the reader to pay attention. This quote sums up his idea of democracy and how it can be used as a tool against oligarchy.

We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we can't have both.

-- Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis (Section 2, Chapter 1 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Sanders uses this quote to reinforce his belief that when wealth is concentrated to the few at the top, a democracy simply cannot exist.

Make no mistake, the economic pie keeps getting bigger. It's just that the poor and middle class are getting smaller and smaller slices. The decline of the middle class has been dramatic, with painful consequences for millions of Americans.

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 2, Chapter 2 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote clearly demonstrates what Sanders believes is the chief economic and political problem facing our nation: wealth and income inequality and the decline of the middle class.

United Technologies made a \$7 billion profit in 2015 thanks to the hard work of its employees, who were rewarded with the announcement that they would soon lose their jobs because they company had to cut costs to remain competitive. Of course, United Technologies had plenty of money in 2014 to provide its retiring CEO, Louis Schenevert, with a golden parachute worth \$172 million. This is the kind of corporate greed that is destroying the middle class of this country - a \$172 million severance package for the boss, while workers are thrown out on the street.

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 2, Chapter 3 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote is an example of corporate greed that Sanders believes in running rampant throughout America. This example in particular demonstrates just how absurd and greedy these corporate big shots can be.

We have been putting far too little emphasis on [drug] prevention, like good education, after-school programming, and meaningful job opportunities that give young people healthy alternatives to drifting into a life of drug use. I have been to communities that



have major drug addiction issues. Meanwhile, their after-school and mentoring programs have been shut down for lack of funds. That's brilliant. Leave kids on the streets with nothing to do, and then become shocked and appalled when they become involved with drugs.

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 2, Chapter 7 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Sanders employs a harsher tone in this quote than in the majority of his discussions. However, it speaks to the anger Sanders feels as government continues to ignore common-sense practices such as basic educational programs that would deter children from drugs. Sanders is frustrated, like many Americans, at the unfair practices perpetuated by the war on drugs.

How can it be that we have enough money to give tax breaks to billionaires and spend more on defense than the next seven countries combined, but we don't have enough to make sure that every American child has a roof over his or her head and enough food to eat?

-- Bernie Sanders (Section 2, Chapter 9 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This quote illuminates the priorities of American government spending; Sanders mocks the government for spending absurd sums on defense and giving tax breaks worth billions of dollars to the most wealthy citizens, while altogether avoiding the almost 20% of American children living in poverty.

Of course just bringing Native American issues to the surface is a good thing because it forces other candidates do talk about the same issues and come up with possible solutions. Only that's not what's happening. Sanders is getting some press on Native issues, but it's really limited. A quick Google search tells the story. Search Bernie Sanders and Native Americans and there are some 771,000 hits, including videos of his speeches and a few news clips, mostly from regional newspapers. There has not been a major story from any TV network

-- Mark Trahan (Section 2, Chapter 10 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This excerpt from a Native American blogger accurately captures Sanders' own frustrations with the mainstream media. His grassroots support was growing at an impressive rate, but the mainstream media did Sanders no favors in terms of face-time.



## Topics for Discussion

**On p. 88, Sanders notes he was greatly inspired by Pope Francis. What is the significance of relying on such an esteemed religious leader?**

Sanders echoes the Pope's call for a "moral economy," one that focuses on the needs of ordinary people instead of the wealthy few (88). He uses this and many other of the Pope's quotes to strengthen his own argument for a government based on morality. For Sanders, calling on the words of Pope Francis put one of the world's greatest progressive and moral leaders in his corner.

**Sanders mentions the need to make a decision whether to run as a Democrat or as an Independent, yet he gives no information about this decision-making process. What do you think influenced Sanders to run as a Democrat?**

Sanders mentions many times throughout the book that he could not take on the political establishment alone. Aside from grassroots support, he needed organizational and political support. His long tenure as an Independent taught him the importance of working alongside those you do not agree with to get work done. He had little organizational support as an Independent, and while it would be easier for him to express his own ideas as an Independent candidate, he knew the current political system virtually does not allow for a third-party president.

**One source named Sanders "the most electable candidate Democrats could nominate" (167). Had Sanders secured the Democratic nomination, how do you think he would have fared against Republican nominee Donald Trump's campaign?**

During the primary elections, Sanders was polling better against Republican candidates than his opponent Hillary Clinton. While speculation is often hard in historical discussions, this election was monumental in American history and deserves analysis from all aspects. Clinton lost popularity largely due to her deleted email scandal; there seemed to be a new email released on a weekly basis. If Sanders had been the Democratic nominee, how might the Republican strategy have changed? Trump's



campaign aggressively attacked Clinton's personal life and choices, a tactic that may have failed against Sanders. Sanders religiously promised to run a campaign based on the issues, which Trump may not have been able to combat.

## **Discuss the relationship between the growth in service-industry jobs and the rising number of college students and graduates.**

One pattern Sanders fails to notice is the correlation between the rising enrollment in higher education, and the rising number of service-industry jobs in America. He notes that the service industry is the fastest-growing industry in today's economy, yet more and more students are seeking higher education in order to stray from a lifelong reliance on low-wage jobs. However, education no longer equates to a middle-class job or lifestyle. This pattern signifies a desire among young Americans to improve their lives, but the current social and economic atmosphere does not allow many young people to truly capitalize on their talents.

## **There are several platforms and political initiatives that Sanders references in every chapter of his book. What is the importance of this repetition?**

Sanders repeats his ideas so frequently to permanently instill his core values into the mind of the reader. These values include climate change, campaign finance reform, income and wealth inequality, and universal health care. More importantly, Sanders repeats these ideals primarily when he is discussing the how each issue affects each other, developing his underlying theme that everything in society is interconnected. Sanders does not feel he can discuss criminal justice reform without also discussing racism and poverty alongside.

## **How is Sanders' chapter "Corporate Media and the Threat to Our Democracy" different from previous chapters?**

This chapter is the only one in the second half of Sanders' book that does not address a specific plan for combating the issue it describes.



## **What are your first thoughts upon hearing the word socialism?**

Sanders' argues that he did not poll well with seniors citizens, despite an impressive track record on behalf of their rights', because of his allegiance to democratic socialism. For those raised during World War II or the Cold War, socialism is an ugly word that carries with it implications of cruel dictatorships and starving masses lining up in bread lines. Readers should take the time to examine their preexisting thoughts of socialism, and then reflect on Sanders' version of socialism to determine what stigma it actually carries with it today.

## **A CNN reporter claimed Sanders did not have "sharp enough elbows" to become a serious presidential candidate (425). Do you agree?**

Sanders prides himself multiple times on his refusal to engage in negative political discourse, including attacks ads. While those thirsty for political change see this as a positive attribute, those inside the political sphere argue that Sanders must get his hands dirty - even if just slightly - to be taken seriously as a national candidate.

## **Use the pharmaceutical industry as an example to explain Sanders' version of a corrupt campaign finance system (pp.326-329).**

Sanders' claims that one of the problems with American health care is the extremely high cost of prescription drugs. He predicts an increase in the cost of these drugs if the government does not intervene to regulate. However, chances for regulation are slim because "the pharmaceutical industry is one of the most politically powerful industries in the country and spends endless amounts of money on lobbying and campaign contributions" (328). Similar to the Koch brothers, Wall Street, and insurance companies, Big Pharma has bought its way into the political system in direct correlation with a population struggling to afford their medicine.





**Sanders presents an argument on page 214 that suggests there is a "disappearing part of a disappearing middle class" in inner cities and rural areas. Is it fair to relate the decline of the American middle class with the birth of the American lower-middle class?**

While Sanders does not explicitly mention the lower-middle class, it is arguably the largest growing demographic in American society as the income gap continues to grow. Prices all-around are rising, while wages for the majority of working Americans stay stagnant, making it "very expensive to be poor" (216). There is no longer a pathway lined with hard work to achieve the middle-class lifestyle, as more and more Americans find themselves in the seemingly inescapable lower-middle class.