BERNIE SANDERS rose to international fame during his campaign to be the Democratic candidate for President of the United States. He is currently serving his second term in the Senate after winning re-election in 2012 with 71 per cent of the vote. Sanders previously served as the lone congressman from Vermont for sixteen years and as mayor of Burlington, Vermont’s largest city, for eight years.
OUR REVOLUTION
A FUTURE TO BELIEVE IN
BERNIE SANDERS

PROFILE BOOKS
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INTRODUCTION

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When we began our race for the presidency in April 2015, we were considered by the political establishment and the media to be a “fringe” campaign, something not to be taken seriously. After all, I was a senator from a small state with very little name recognition. Our campaign had no money, no political organization, and we were taking on the entire Democratic Party establishment. And, by the way, we were also running against the most powerful political operation in the country. The Clinton machine had won the presidency for Bill Clinton twice and almost won the Democratic presidential nomination for Hillary Clinton in 2008.

When our campaign finally came to a close in July 2016, it turned out that the pundits had got it wrong—big-time. We had made history and run one of the most consequential campaigns in the modern history of the country—a campaign that would, in a very profound way, change America.

We received more than 13 million votes in primaries and caucuses throughout the country. We won twenty-two states, more than a few by landslide proportions. We won 1,846 pledged delegates to the Democratic Convention, 46 percent of the total.

Importantly, in virtually every state, we won a strong majority of younger people—the future of America. We won large percentages of the vote from white, black, Latino, Asian-American, and Native American youth. We set the agenda for the America of tomorrow.

On April 25, 2016, The Washington Post reported on a poll conducted by the Harvard Institute of Politics. “‘The data, collected by researchers at
Harvard University, suggest that not only has Sanders’s campaign made for an unexpectedly competitive Democratic primary, he has also changed the way millennials think about politics,’ said polling director John Della Volpe. ‘He’s not moving a party to the left. He’s moving a generation to the left,’ Della Volpe said of the senator from Vermont. ‘Whether or not he’s winning or losing, it’s really that he’s impacting the way in which a generation—the largest generation in the history of America—thinks about politics.’”

At a time when political apathy is high, voter turnout is abysmally low, and millions of Americans are giving up on the political process, our campaign attracted the energetic support of hundreds of thousands of volunteers in every state in the country. We had the largest rallies of the campaign and, in total, more than 1.4 million people attended our public meetings.

As a result of our victories in a number of states, there are now at least five new chairs of state Democratic parties who were elected as part of the political revolution. Further, there are a number of progressive candidates, energized and supported by our campaign, running for office for everything from school board to the U.S. Congress—and many of them will win. New blood. New energy in the political process.

And we showed—in a way that can change politics in America forever—that you can run a competitive national grassroots campaign without begging millionaires and billionaires for campaign contributions. We, proudly, were the only campaign not to have a super PAC. In a manner unprecedented in American history, we received some 8 million individual campaign contributions. The average contribution was $27. These donations came from 2.5 million Americans, the vast majority of whom were low- or moderate-income people.

During the campaign, we forced discussion on issues the establishment had swept under the rug for far too long. We brought attention to the grotesque level of income and wealth inequality in this country and the importance of breaking up the large banks that brought our economy to the brink of collapse. We exposed our horrendous trade policies, our broken criminal justice system, and our people’s lack of access to affordable health care and higher education. We addressed the global crisis of climate change, the need for real comprehensive immigration reform, the importance of developing a foreign policy that values diplomacy over war, and so much more.

Importantly, the support that we won showed that our ideas were not
outside of the mainstream. We showed that millions of Americans want a bold, progressive agenda that takes on the billionaire class and creates a government that works for all of us and not just for big campaign donors.

The widespread and popular support we received for our agenda helped transform the Democratic Party and forced Secretary Clinton to move her position closer to ours in a number of areas. She began the campaign as a supporter of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Keystone Pipeline. She ended up being in opposition to both. As a result of negotiations between the two camps after the campaign ended, Secretary Clinton adopted bold positions on higher education and health care that moved her closer to what we had advocated.

Our campaign also had a huge impact on the writing of the most progressive platform, by far, in the history of the Democratic Party. Despite being in the minority, our supporters ended up shaping much of that platform. Here is some of what the Democratic Party of 2016 stands for:

- A $15-an-hour federal minimum wage, the expansion of Social Security benefits, and the creation of millions of new jobs that will be needed to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure.
- The breaking up of too-big-to-fail banks and the creation of a twenty-first-century Glass-Steagall Act.
- The closing of loopholes that allow multinational corporations to avoid federal taxes by stashing their cash in offshore tax havens.
- The combating of climate change by putting a price on carbon and transforming our energy system away from fossil fuels.
- Major criminal justice reform, including the abolition of the death penalty, the ending of private prisons, and the establishment of a path toward the legalization of marijuana.
- The passage of comprehensive immigration reform.
- The most expansive agenda ever for protecting Native American rights.

During the fifteen months of the campaign there was one central point that I made over and over again, and let me repeat it here: This campaign was never just about electing a president of the United States—as enormously important as that was. This campaign was about transforming America. It was about the understanding that real change never takes place from the
top on down. It always takes place from the bottom on up. It takes place when ordinary people, by the millions, are prepared to stand up and fight for justice.

That’s what the history of the trade union movement is about. That’s what the history of the women’s movement is about. That’s what the history of the civil rights movement is about. That’s what the history of the gay rights movement is about. That’s what the history of the environmental movement is about. That’s what any serious movement for justice is about.

That’s what the political revolution is about.

I ended this campaign far more optimistic about the future of our country than when I began. How could it be otherwise? In fields in California, I spoke to thousands of working people from every conceivable background who came together determined to transform our country. They were farmworkers, environmentalists, gay activists, and students. They know, and I know, that we are stronger when we stand together and do not allow demagogues to divide us up by race, gender, sexual orientation, or where we were born.

In Portland, Maine, on a cold day, my staff watched people wait outside on long lines for hours, determined to cast their votes at the caucus there. In Arizona, it took some people five hours to cast a vote—but they stayed and voted. All across this country, people are fighting back to create the vibrant democracy that we desperately need and to stop our drift toward oligarchy.

In New York City, I walked the picket line with striking workers at Verizon who were determined not to see the company cut benefits and outsource jobs. They stood up against outrageous corporate greed. They stood together as a proud union. And they won.

In Washington, D.C., I marched with low-wage workers who told the world that they cannot survive on the starvation minimum wage that currently exists. That we need to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. Their message and their fight is reverberating all across the country.

This book describes the history-making campaign that we ran. But more important, it looks to the future. It lays out a new path for America based on principles of economic, social, racial, and environmental justice. On behalf of our children and grandchildren, it is a path that must be followed and a fight that must be won.

The struggle continues.
PART

ONE

Running for President
I grew up in a three-and-a-half-room rent-controlled apartment. My older brother, Larry, and I spent years sleeping on couches in the living room. During the 2016 New York State primary, in order to remind New Yorkers that I had grown up in Brooklyn, we held a rally on the street where I was raised, East Twenty-sixth Street. Fifty-six years after I left, I had a chance to visit the apartment where I spent my first eighteen years. Somehow, it had shrunk. God, it was small. The kitchen/dining room was tiny. It was hard to imagine our family of four having dinner there every night together. And the whole building looked dingier than I remembered. And so many apartments on one floor.

One of my first memories was being on the sidewalk outside of the apartment house where we lived on Kings Highway in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. There was a military parade. It was the end of World War II. I was four years old.

That war, Hitler, and the Holocaust surely played a major role in shaping the direction of my life. I remember the photos of my father’s family in Poland—killed by the Nazis. I remember a telephone call in the middle of the night, which never happened in our apartment, telling my father the good news that a cousin of his was still alive and in a displaced persons camp. I remember crying whenever I saw photos in a book about the destruction of the Jews. I remember seeing people in the neighborhood with tattooed numbers on their arms—survivors of concentration camps.
I remember the excitement in the community at the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

No question about it. Being Jewish. The loss of family, including children my own age, in the Holocaust. The rise to power of a right-wing lunatic in a free election in Germany. A war that killed 50 million people, including more than one-third of all Jews on the planet. All of this had an indelible impact upon my life and thinking.

My brother, Larry, six years older than me, introduced me to politics and a whole lot else. He has played an enormously important role in my life, and I am forever grateful for his love, counsel, and overall wisdom. For the last fifty years he has lived in Oxford, England, where he raised his family and worked as a social worker. Ten years ago he was elected to the Oxfordshire County Council as a candidate of the Green Party, and he was reelected for a second term. He is now active in efforts to maintain a strong National Health Service system in the UK.

My mother taught Larry how to read when he was very young, and he has been a voracious reader for his entire life. Larry first read to me when I was four or five. We would stay in bed late on Saturday mornings going through stacks of comic books. When we were kids he was my mentor and, as older brothers occasionally are, my tormentor. He was very smart, always knew the answers that I didn’t—and he let me know it.

Being an older brother is not easy. Occasionally, when you want to go out and spend time with your friends, you have to take care of your kid brother and drag him along. Not fun. On Saturdays, if my parents were away, Larry would also have to prepare lunch for me. I thought his cooking was great. His spaghetti with ketchup and his My-T-Fine chocolate pudding were outstanding.

My parents were not much into reading books, and there were few of them in the house. While we borrowed books from the local library, it was
Larry who first brought books into our home and onto a bookshelf. More important, it was Larry who helped me understand what some of those books were about. He was a good teacher, and opened my eyes to so much.

While my parents were not particularly political, they always voted Democratic, as did virtually the entire Jewish neighborhood in which we lived. Larry brought politics into the house when, as a student at Brooklyn College, he joined the Young Democrats and campaigned for Adlai Stevenson in 1956.

During my presidential campaign I was delighted that Larry and his wife, Janet, and son, Jacob, were able to join me at some of our events. I was even prouder when, as a delegate from Democrats Abroad at the Democratic Convention, he cast, with tears in his eyes, his one vote for my nomination.

Was my family “poor”? No. Did we (as the economists say) have much discretionary income? Absolutely not.

My dad was a paint salesman with the Keystone Paint and Varnish Company. He came to this country from Poland at the age of seventeen without a nickel in his
pocket. He was always employed and made enough money to provide for his wife, Dorothy, and his two sons, but not much more than that.

Money (or more appropriately, lack of money) was always a point of contention in the house. There were arguments and more arguments between my parents. Painful arguments. Bitter arguments. Arguments that seared through a little boy’s brain, never to be forgotten.

“Bernard. Go out and get some groceries. Here’s what we need. Here’s the list,” my mother said. And, dutiful son of twelve, I went out and bought the groceries. But I went to the wrong store. I went to the small shop a few blocks away, rather than the Waldbaum’s grocery store on Nostrand Avenue. I paid more than I should have. When I returned and my mother realized what I had done, the screaming was horrible. Money was hard to come by. Not to be wasted.

When I was thirteen, I wanted a leather jacket. It was the fashion. Everyone had one and I was tired of my brother’s hand-me-down coat. “Okay,” said Mom. “Let’s get you a leather jacket.” This became the shopping trip from hell. It’s probably why sixty-two years later—ask my wife if I’m lying—I still hate shopping and why I want to escape if I am in a department store for more than a half hour.

On that day my mother took me to at least a dozen stores in search of the lowest price on a leather jacket. We started off at several stores at the Kings Highway shopping district. Then we got on the subway to the large department stores in downtown Brooklyn and Manhattan. There was no leather jacket in New York City that I didn’t try on.

Well, you guessed it: We ended up buying the jacket from the first store we had visited on Kings Highway much earlier in the day. It’s funny to think about that now. It wasn’t funny then.

How much money your family had determined the quality of your baseball glove, which brand of sneakers you wore, and what kind of car your father drove. It also, of course, determined whether you lived in a rent-controlled apartment house (as most of my friends did) or a “private house.” Not until I was much older did I learn that most people did not refer to the average house on a street as a “private house.” But that distinction was very clear where I lived. Those of us who lived in apartment houses were working class and those who lived in “private houses” were middle class. It was one of the early class distinctions that I remember.

I spent much of my childhood playing out on the street or in school-
yards. The street was our world, and we never left home without a pink Spalding rubber ball. Unlike today, there was no adult supervision. None at all. We organized all the games by ourselves.

We played hour after hour after hour. On the street we played hide-and-seek, punchball, hockey, two-hand touch football, and stickball—with time-outs when cars passed by and strict rules as to what happened when the ball got stuck under a parked car. We pitched marbles into sewer grates. If your marble went down the hole in the middle, you got ten marbles back.

We played wall ball against the sides of the buildings. We played box ball on the sidewalk, curb ball against the curbs, and stoopball against the stoops. We played regular handball and Chinese handball. We flipped baseball cards. We raced. In the school yard of PS 197, where I went to elementary school a few blocks from where I lived, we played softball and basketball until we were so tired we could barely drag ourselves home. For nourishment, we chipped in to buy a large bottle of soda.

What I learned playing on the streets and playgrounds of Brooklyn was not just how to become a decent ballplayer and athlete. I learned a profound lesson about democracy and self-rule. From playing punchball and stickball? Yes.

There were no adults on the streets or playgrounds where we spent much of our lives. Nobody supervised us. Nobody coached us. Nobody refereed our games. We were on our own. Everything was organized and determined by the kids themselves. The group worked out our disagreements, made all the decisions, and learned to live with them.

“What game should we play? . . . Hey. That’s a great idea, let’s do it.”
“Can I borrow your baseball glove? . . . Who brought the bat and ball? . . . Was he safe or was he out? . . . Was the ball foul or was it fair?”

There was no debate about who played on which side. Everyone knew who was the best, second-best, and third-best basketball player when we chose up teams. That’s the way it was.

In three-man basketball, the team that lost went to the sidelines and a new team replaced them to challenge the winners. Those were the rules.

And it all worked out.

It was, as I think about it now, an amazingly democratic and self-sustaining community which taught me lessons about working with people that I’ve never forgotten.

The other thing I’ve never forgotten was the relationship that the kids on the block, and the entire community, had with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Sometimes, as I travel about, I am asked which baseball team I rooted for when I was growing up. Are you kidding? There was only one team. And they were family.

Gil Hodges at first, Jackie Robinson or Junior Gilliam at second, Pee Wee Reese (my favorite player) at shortstop, Billy Cox at third, Gene Hermanski in left field, the Duke in center, Carl Furillo in right, Roy Campanella behind the plate. On the mound we had Preacher Roe, Don Newcombe, Carl Erskine, Johnny Podres, Clem Labine, Joe Black, Sandy Koufax—among many others. Those names are indelibly planted on my mind. Sixty years have come and gone, and I remember those mythical figures like it was yesterday.

It would have been unthinkable for anyone on the block not to know the names of the players, their batting averages, and the win-loss record of the pitchers. We knew who they were playing on a given day, where they were playing, who was pitching, and how many games out of first place they might be. We also knew as much information about their personal lives as the baseball cards we flipped and traded provided. Most of our contact with the Dodgers came through the radio and TV play-by-play commentary of Red Barber and Vin Scully, who were as familiar to us as the players.

Ebbets Field, where the Dodgers played, was a half-hour subway ride away, and we would go to the ball games a few Saturdays or Sundays a season, sometimes for a doubleheader. Usually, we got the 60-cent bleacher