THERE IS NO LIMIT TO
WHAT A MAN CAN DO
OR WHERE HE CAN GO
IF HE DOESN'T MIND
WHO GETS THE CREDIT

PETE SOUZA

*As photographer to Presidents Obama and Reagan, **Pete Souza** knows what goes on inside the White House better than most. He tells Keith Wilson why it's no ordinary job and what he thinks of the present occupant…*

WITH THE publication of his new book, *Shade: A Tale of Two Presidents*, Pete Souza makes it abundantly clear that he's not a fan of the Trump presidency. The book, which debuted at number 1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, has been described as, "a portrait in Presidential contrasts, telling the tale of the Obama and Trump administrations through a series of visual juxtapositions." These contrasts became starkly apparent soon after Trump's inauguration in January 2017, when Souza began using his Instagram account to post photos of Obama as a riposte to Trump's latest decisions. For example, Trump's controversial early executive order to ban immigration from mostly Muslim nations was countered by Souza's photograph of a smiling Obama meeting a refugee girl.

The Instagram posts continued daily and have culminated in the new book, which features over a hundred of Souza's witty photos of President Obama paired with Trump's controversial tweets and quotes from the first 500 days of his office. Since its publication Souza has been in demand up and down the land for TV appearances and interviews…

01 OFFICE OF STATE
Low autumn sunlight streams through the window behind President Reagan at his desk in the Oval Office, October 1988

02 FOUR PRESIDENTS AND A FUNERAL
President George W Bush and his wife Lauren look across to a grieving Nancy Reagan at her husband's funeral in 2004

03 MAN IN THE MIDDLE
Nancy and President Reagan in the White House Diplomatic Reception Room about to present Michael Jackson with a lifetime achievement for his work assisting the National Campaign Against Drunk Driving

04 INSIDE THE SITUATION ROOM
President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton among those watching the video feed of the US special forces op to capture and kill Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks

Lens	Canon EF 35mm f/1.4L USM
Exposure	1/100 sec, f/3.5, ISO1600

What motivated you to do this?
Well, as I tell people, if any other person had been elected president, I wouldn't be doing this at all. I find that having worked for both President Obama and President Reagan, we now have someone as president who disrespects the office of the presidency by the way he disrespects other people. I just didn't feel that I could not do something and speak out.

'Throwing shade' is not an expression we hear often...
It's a way of commenting on something you don't like. So a way of subtly pointing out, in my case, the massive differences between the Obama administration and the Trump administration.

Did you have an inkling when Trump was running for the presidency that you might end up doing something like this even before he won the election?
Not at all. Mostly because in no way did I feel that he would actually win the election. I just didn't think it was possible, so the thought didn't enter my brain until after the inauguration when that whole day – President Obama's last day, Trump's first day – was such a surreal historical moment. As the day played out I was getting more and more concerned about how much damage this guy would do to our country, just by the way he behaved at the inauguration on January the 20th. It was really just a couple of days afterwards that I made my first post on Instagram about this, what you would call, 'throwing shade'. So I guess it didn't really start until after the actual inauguration of Trump.

> **"The one thing about being president is that it doesn't change who you are. I think it magnifies who you are"**

It sounds like an incredibly strange day, was it also your last day as Obama's photographer?
On the books I was done by noon, on January the 20th, but the reality is that I continued to photograph until I flew with him to Palm Springs. The outgoing president in our country can use Air Force One for one last time and so he and Michelle flew out to Palm Springs. I accompanied him out on that trip and saw him off the plane. I stayed on the plane and flew back to Washington DC.

You had an extraordinary insight into both the Obama and Reagan presidencies. How did they differ in the way they reacted to you and used photography?
I think those are two different questions. One, it was a completely different era in the Reagan days, that was back in the 1980s. I was a very young man and Reagan was in his 70s. I wasn't the chief photographer, so I didn't have as much access as I did with President Obama. Because Reagan was an older man and he didn't do as much outside of the Oval

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office as President Obama did. It was different technologically in the fact that with Reagan we shot all film, which presents its own issues. With President Obama it was all digital. In terms of your workflow there's great differences in that.

In terms of using photography, I think the Reagan people used my photography in a similar way to President Obama, but with one stark difference, and that is President Obama happened to be president when social media just exploded. Instagram didn't exist before his first administration and in the Reagan days there was no such thing as the Internet or cable TV. There was just the three network TV stations and then CNN started, I think, in 1984. The Obama administration made more present day use of my photography than the Reagan administration did, just because of social media more than anything.

Did you have more freedom in the Obama White House?

I don't think that came into play because of the technological considerations. It was more because coming into the White House I had already known Barack Obama for four years. My getting access to essentially everything he did was because he understood the value of creating this visual archive for history – he trusted me enough to allow me to be included in all of these sensitive meetings.

Speaking of sensitive meetings, one of your most memorable photographs is of the Situation Room during the raid to capture Osama Bin Laden. Was that the most difficult, tensest situation you had photographed?

Difficult? Not really, but I was never, before or after, in a situation where there was as much tension or anxiety. It was very pervasive, you could feel it. But it wasn't a difficult situation.

Some of your most poignant pictures are those from President Reagan's funeral. What was that like to cover, not just as a photographer, but as someone who knew Reagan and his family?

I was honoured that Mrs Reagan asked me to cover the funeral. It was a little strange to go to a funeral for someone that you knew really well but not to be a participant, but the person documenting that funeral. It was an emotional experience because I was trying to make really good pictures, but a lot of memories

> **"I was never, before or after, in a situation where there was as much tension or anxiety"**

came back because I'd left the Reagan White House in January of 1989 and this was 2004; 15 years had passed since I had been in his presence every day. As you see people at the funeral, or even some of the pall bearers I knew, just a flood of memories came roaring back and all the time I was just trying to do my job.

To put it simply, is the primary role of a White House photographer to be a fly on the wall, a recorder?

The job of official White House Photographer, or chief White House Photographer, is to visually document the presidency for history. It depends on the relationship between the president and his or her photographer and how much access they're going to get and what that really means. So, no matter who the photographer is and who the president is, every picture ends up going into what our

05 COLD WAR SUMMIT
President Reagan and Soviet Union leader Mikhael Gorbachev leave Hofdi House in Reykjavik, Iceland, on the last day of their historic meeting in 1986

06 DRIVE TIME
The Obamas wave to crowds during the inaugural parade in Washington DC when President Obama was sworn in for his second term of office; January, 2013

Lens	Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L II USM
Exposure	1/125 sec, f/4.5, ISO400

07 FAMILY SNOW FIGHT
President Obama plays in a snow-filled White House rose garden with his two daughters, Malia and Sasha

Lens	Canon EF 70-200mm f/4L IS USM
Exposure	1/200 sec, f/6.3, ISO320

"I was off sick only one day in eight years and I didn't take any vacation for the first five years"

country calls the National Archives. They document and archive these photographs in perpetuity. For example, if you were to go right now to the Reagan Library website, you would see every single image I ever shot while I was in the Reagan White House. All the photographs from the Obama administration are already in the National Archives.

How many pictures did you take during the Obama presidency?
I shot almost two million photos. I guess a very small percentage of them were made public at the time, but there's probably 1.8 million that haven't been made public yet.

Was there ever a time when you weren't photographing in the White House, was there an historic moment that you missed?
No, I was actually there all of the time. I was off sick only one day in eight years and I didn't take any vacation for the first five years. So, the last three years I took one week vacation each year. I still went with him on vacation because when you're president something could happen when you're on vacation. So, I thought if I was going to take a vacation it would be better to do it when he was on vacation – that's what I did for the last three years. I didn't miss any big events. I made the decision early on that if I'm going to document for history, you can't say when history is going to take place all the time. In those three weeks of vacation I missed maybe a few interesting pictures but they weren't history making shots.

Have you given advice to the current chief White House photographer?
Shealah Craighead, Trump's photographer, was hired very late in the process, just before the inauguration, so I had one conversation with her on the phone and it was mostly about logistical things and I offered my help, but I never heard back from her. I was willing to give her advice but I wasn't really asked for it.

How do you think Donald Trump feels about the camera?
I think he loves the camera. I think his presidency is about being a reality show. He likes it when all the cameras come into the room, for meetings and such.

When did you first meet Obama and what made you decide to

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follow him when he ran for the White House?
I happened to be working for the *Chicago Tribune* as their Washington DC photographer when Barack Obama was elected to the Senate in 2004. When he came to Washington, the Tribune decided to take an extensive look at his first year in the Senate. To do that I needed to get access to him and because we were the 'hometown' newspaper, I got access that no-one else got to him. Just through that, because you're working in such close proximity to him, you get to know the guy a little bit and he got to see how I worked and that first year continued into his second year in the Senate where I continued to cover him for the Tribune. I think it was because of that relationship that when he was elected to the White House, he asked me to become his official photographer.

Who did you draw your inspiration from when you took on the job? Who were your heroes and mentors in the industry?
For this job at the White House it was Yoichi Okamoto, LBJ's (Lyndon Baines Johnson, 36th President of the United States) photographer. He was really the first official White House photographer to document a presidency for history. President Kennedy had two military photographers rotating, but they didn't

STORY BEHIND THE SHOT

When Spider-Man met the President

President Obama's humour was superbly illustrated during this spontaneous moment

The Spider-Man kid is three-year-old Nicholas Tamarin, the son of a Nate Tamarin, a longtime aide of President Obama, who had known him since his Senate days. "There was this Halloween party for all the kids of the White House staffers," says Souza, "and President Obama's secretary said to Nate, 'why don't you bring your son over to say hi to the President?' So, they came over and President Obama said hi to the little kid and then as he was walking back to the Oval office he said to the kid, 'Zap me with your web one last time', and that's what's happening there."

08 DANCING WITH THE STARS
John Travolta and Princess Diana on the dance floor, watched by the Reagans and guests at a White House reception in 1985

09 OBAMA AND PUTIN FACE-OFF
A tense exchange between President Obama and Russian president Vladimir Putin during the 70th anniversary celelbrations of D-Day at Château de Bénouville, Normandy; June 2014

Lens	Canon EF24-70mm f/2.8L II USM
Exposure	1/160 sec, f/3.2, ISO640

10 TAKING IT IN
Obama during a budget meeting in 2009

Lens	Canon EF 135mm f/2L USM
Exposure	1/100 sec, f/2, ISO500

have access to everything. When LBJ took over the presidency, when Kennedy was killed, he brought onboard this guy, Yoichi Okamoto, and gave him total access. For me, he was the guy who had always set the bar so high in terms of the role of official White House photographer, so that was my goal, to at least get the same kind of access he did to President Obama. They're completely different people, LBJ and President Obama, and my pictures reflect that difference, but for access and the art of photography Okamoto was the guy that I looked up to.

You obviously got to know him very well as a person as well as the president – are there two sides to him?
You know, I don't think there's two sides to him. The one thing about being president is that it doesn't change who you are. I think it magnifies who you are. We know what Donald Trump is like just by the way he behaves in public. President Obama, maybe he's funnier and more disciplined than people realize. It's not that he's any different, I just think it's that people didn't get to see his humour like I did, or how disciplined he was about his work.

What kit were you using to shoot with in the White House?
In the White House I used the Canon 5D Mk II and then we upgraded to the Canon 5D Mk III when that came out. I would usually carry two cameras, one with a wide-angle lens and one with a telephoto lens. So, when I was inside the White House I would usually walk around with an EF 35mm, a 50mm lens and a 135mm, then occasionally use an 85mm or a 24mm. Then, when Canon came out with the second version of the EF 24-70mm Mk II zoom, I found that lens was really sharp and started using that a lot more. I didn't like the first version of that lens, but the second version was really sharp. I would always have the 35mm lens with me because some of the rooms in the White House were just lousy lighting. That Situation Room photo (page 67) was taken with the 35mm lens.

What about the Oval Office itself, is that a nice place to photograph?
During the day the Oval Office has flat light. During the winter and late fall, the sun is lower down on the horizon and you get some direct sunlight coming straight into the Oval Office which occasionally would give you some different kind of light. I didn't like the Oval Office in the summer because the sun was so high and the leaves were on the trees. But then in the winter and late fall, the leaves have dropped off the trees and the sun is lower on the horizon so you get a lot more interesting direct light coming into play.

Out of many, do you have one standout memory from the White House years?
Well, the first memory is that I got married there! President Obama insisted

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that we host our wedding in the rose garden, so we had a small ceremony and obviously that memory will always remain, but another one was in October 2015. It was the day the US Supreme Court upheld same sex marriage in the country, but it was also to be the same day that President Obama was giving the eulogy for the pastor that was shot and killed along with nine other African Americans at a church in South Carolina. The emotions of that day – it started out with the ruling of the Supreme Court and all the celebrating, and then we flew to South Carolina for him to give this eulogy from this mass shooting. The emotions were completely different there and then we flew back to Washington that night and the White House had all been lit up in rainbow colours in celebration of that Supreme Court ruling.

After everything, where is your photography taking you now?

I got sidetracked by these two books and have spent most of my time on these books in some capacity, whether it was editing photos, working with the designer, speaking about the books, or book signings. Next year will be the first chance I've had (since Trump's inauguration) to shoot a lot. I'm really hoping to get out more and do some new photography.

PROFILE

Pete Souza

Former chief White House photographer

Pete was the chief official White House photographer for Barack Obama and the director of the White House photo office. In 2017, his book, *Obama: An Intimate Portrait*, debuted at number 1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list. He's worked as the national photographer for the *Chicago Tribune* and was among the first photojournalists to cover the fall of Kabul following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. During the 1980s, Souza was also the official White House photographer for President Reagan. www.petesouza.com

Pete will be speaking on the Super Stage at The Photography Show, which is at the NEC from 16-19 March. See www.photographyshow.com

Next issue: Ali Khalifa Bin Thalith, the amazing underwater photographer