

The Birth of Trumpland: Notes on an Inauguration

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

Region: [USA](#)

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With the country ridden by woe and revulsion; with the discontent so profound and vicious, the Trump presidency began. It did so by way of comparison – of the chalk-cheese variety. In 2008, when the shining armour of Knight Obama took centre stage, there were sighs, ecstatic releases, heavy exhalations of hope. The theme, then, to start this presidency: numbers of attendees.

The notes and observations initially resembled a cock fight of history. Pictures were disseminated through the main news sites: the conspicuously larger numbers at the 2009 inauguration measured against the thinner ones in 2017. The “popular vote” was mentioned, a sneer against legitimacy. (Inside every believer in democracy is a dormant petty tyrant.) Ignorance also finds a loud, jabbering voice, not all of it stemming from Trump’s aisle. He is characterised as exceptional – negatively so. There is a dogmatic refusal that he is not the legitimate president.

It is easy to ignore, in the age of the vacuous tweet or the dribbling that counts for a Facebook post, that there were presidencies that almost took the world to nuclear conflict. There were presidencies that established torture and extraordinary rendition as necessary practices. There were presidencies engaged, much against the wishes of the initial founders of the US Republic, in the blood soaked game of empire, with its alliances and territories of control. Even the armour on Knight Obama began to suffer from imperial rust.

Where there is little to say – Trump’s presidential record is embryonic; where there is sheer bewilderment, minds vanish and vacation into the night of dark ponderings. Visceral senses take over. In Trumpland, those senses have become the format of a program, the US as the greatest reality television show. But it would be ridiculous to see this as pure televisual evocation, as the total negation of reality.

For one, he is the astringent fruit of a broken US, a cruel reality that has somehow been locked away in a cupboard of theoretical curiosities. “This American carnage,” as he termed it, “stops right here and stops right now.” The carnage, he explained on the steps of the Capitol, involved closing factories, vicious crime rates, a failed education system.

Visions of fracture, disappearance, decay. “We, the citizens of America, are now joined in a great national effort to rebuild our country and to restore its promise for all our people.” The theme of repair writ through, with the accusation that the managers had failed the country. “Together, we will determine the course of America, and the world, for many years to come.”

The return of power to the people, a populist seizing of the day that suggests revolution.

“January 20th, 2017, will be remembered as the day the people became rulers of this nation once again. The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer.”

Well that may be, but there is little doubt that the art of being frivolous will also be practiced. The message of reclaiming sovereignty may well be strong one, but the new president remains, at heart, a businessman. Trump, as president, was delighted by his pens and the signatures in the President's Room soon after being sworn in. "Are we getting some more pens back there?" he ribbed.

Trump's triumph, the essence of mockery, has been the cathartic cleansing of the mirage of harmony, of conciliation, and acceptance. It was a rough, extensive puke at the pointy-headed intellectuals, as the four time Alabama governor George Wallace termed them. It was a decidedly firm middle-finger directed against the acceptance of the electoral experts, or experts of any sort. Nostalgia tied the knot with a snorting revenge.

That nostalgia has already taken its first bite: a scrubbing of the government website of various Obama administration initiatives. Gone from the White House site is any reflection about the existential threat posed by climate change. It is too gloomy, not America First enough.

Nostalgia, therefore, would not tolerate it. Instead, what Trump has supplied is "An America First Energy Plan": "For too long, we've been held back by burdensome regulations on our energy industry. President Trump is committed to eliminating harmful and unnecessary policies such as the Climate Action Plan and the Waters of the US rule."

The goal of such adjustments to reality? To "greatly help American workers, increasing wages by more than \$30 billion over the next 7 years." [1] America First is not a terrain of complexity, but one that appeals to red tape cutting simplicity. Out of that idea, jobs are supposedly going to emanate like bright sparks.

This inauguration has been a painful birth. The mother continues to writhe in disgust and amazement, pondering whether the child needs strangling, if not smothering. But in the end, it has remained yet another inauguration, another birth, the dawn of another era. Dullness will find some way of entering the Oval Office, lumbering away to make matters plain and perhaps less terrifying.

There might – the thought is considered surprising – be a tedium, only ruptured by the chatter of the news room or the speculation of the pundit. Trump may start using the @POTUS handle to tweet, which would be a representative surrender to establishment officials over the populist hotline of Twitter. The court expert will be heard, and the President will operate accordingly. Whether he will be *permitted* to do by electoral blessing remains the dangerous, unanswered question.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Notes

[1] <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-energy>

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