

# Donald Trump becomes America's 45th president

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“CARNAGE”. That word—one not usually associated with inaugural addresses or any appeal to national unity—formed the smouldering, incendiary core of President Donald Trump’s first speech after taking his oath of office on January 20th. The term is how Mr. Trump summed up the past few decades of social and economic change witnessed in America. Other presidents have called for reconciliation in their inaugural addresses, celebrated progress or appealed to the “better angels of our nature”—soft, hand-wringing naïfs that they were. Not Mr. Trump. Speaking to Americans who live far from the West Front of the Capitol, the 45th president addressed himself to those citizens that he called “righteous people” and “forgotten men and women”. He told them that they were part of an unprecedented historical movement that had taken back power from the corrupt and selfish elites that control both political parties in Washington, an establishment that had enriched and protected itself while leaving the real America wracked by poverty, crime and insecurity. No longer, the new president promised. “This American carnage stops right here and stops right now.”

Mr. Trump’s speech prompted roars of approval from passionate supporters crammed into the National Mall far below, who broke out in chants of “Trump, Trump, Trump”. Many new presidents have promised to be a leader for all Americans, and not just those who voted for them in the recent election. Some have talked of their eagerness to work with both parties in Congress. Not Mr. Trump. **As a chill rain fell from leaden skies, he leaned into his lectern as if firing up a campaign rally and told those celebrating his victory in the Mall or watching at home that they were “rulers of this nation again”, and—crucially—of a nation that “exists to serve its citizens.”**

How does Mr. Trump define these new rulers? How does he identify his movement of “you” and “us”—come to seize power from “them”, the unrighteous Establishment? A political

scientist might turn to surveys from the 2016 campaign which showed that one of the biggest divides in America is between those who believe that life is worse today for people like them than it was 50 years ago. An opinion poll taken in August 2016 by the Pew Research Centre found that 81% of Trump supporters feel done down by the past half-century of change, while only 19% of Clinton supporters agreed. A sociologist would note that blacks, Hispanics, women, gays, religious minorities and other groups have seen real progress since 1967, while white men (the core of the Trump vote) have seen relative declines in their social power. An economic historian would note that while many millions of jobs have been created by new industries and technologies, blue-collar manufacturing jobs have been destroyed by global competition and automation. **Populists of the Left would say that billionaires and Wall Street bankers are “them”, and the 99% are “us”.**

Not Mr. Trump. Just moments after swearing his oath on a childhood Bible and a Bible used by Abraham Lincoln, he offered an altogether simpler way to identify his people, and to separate them from the unworthy elites. **For Mr. Trump, despite excoriating Wall Street bankers on the campaign trail, has appointed several captains of finance, including five past employees of Goldman Sachs, to his cabinet or inner circle.** So instead, in language that echoes any number of populist-nationalists currently doing so well in Europe, Mr. Trump spoke of the nation, God and national pride. He talked of protection, strength, the blood patriots and borders secured against foreign threats and imports. In one of the only passages to nod to racial tensions roiling America, he assured those in his movement that patriotism would dissolve all divisions, assuring them: **“At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other. When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice.”**

Some of the loudest cheers greeted one of the promises that will be hardest to keep, when Mr. Trump said: "We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones—and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth." The cheers acknowledged an insider reference: along with other Republicans Mr. Trump has repeatedly suggested that Mr. Obama's reluctance to characterise America's enemies as radical Islamists (for fear of making the fight against terrorism sound like a clash of civilisations) was appeasement.

As is usual with an inaugural address, there were rather few specific policy proposals. There was no explicit mention of a wall with Mexico, of tariffs on foreign-made goods, or of talks with Russia on fighting the Islamic State extremist group—all staples of the Trump platform to date. But there was nothing for those hoping to see a more pragmatic, moderate President Trump take office, or to hear him admit that the world is complex and less pliable than he pretended on the campaign trail. All populists are at heart conspiracy theorists, who pretend that easy solutions exist to society's woes and have only not been tried to date because elites are wicked and deaf to the sturdy common-sense of decent, ordinary folk.

That was the Trump approach. For many decades, he growled: “We’ve enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry, subsidised the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military. We defended other nations’ borders while refusing to defend our own and spent trillions and trillions overseas while America’s infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay.” The bean-counting experts so despised by Mr. Trump might quibble and note that though the wars of the past 15 years have been ruinously expensive,

America still spends more on its armed services than any other country by far, and in 2017 will spend \$4.5bn on border security, according to budget analysis by the National Immigration Forum, an advocacy group.

Mr. Trump preferred to tell a bleak story about heartless choices, consciously made. Elites have made “other countries rich while the wealth, strength and confidence of our country has dissipated over the horizon”. Factories were closed “with not even a thought” for the millions of workers left behind.

Foreign leaders, anxiously waiting to hear whether Mr. Trump will erect trade barriers to foreign-made goods, will have flinched to hear the new president vow that his policy would be “only America first”.

Every decision “on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs will be made to benefit American workers and American borders,” he thundered. “Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.”

This new vision for popular government, with its patriotism tests and demands for total allegiance, is not tolerant of dissent or even of those expressing qualms. One of the first to learn that harsh lesson was Senator Charles Schumer of New York, who as leader of the Democratic minority in the Senate was allowed to speak briefly before Mr. Trump. As soon as he began by talking of the national mood as tumultuous, and warned of “a politics too often consumed by rancor”, bellows of displeasure began drifting from the crowd far below. When Mr. Schumer hailed “Americans whose families have been here for generations and those who have just arrived,” the booing grew louder. From where Lexington was sitting with other members of the much-loathed press, high up near the still more-hated politicians attending the ceremony, the boos felt like waves breaking on the colonnaded Capitol front, and evidence of a storm that began far away.

In the streets of central Washington the mood was edgy, even sullen. Washington is a Democratic-voting city and a company town, whose business is federal politics and government. It is not Trump country. Trump supporters in red “Make America Great Again” baseball caps, and clutching the tourist maps of out-of-towners, rode the Metro next to hipsters sporting “Trump has a tiny penis” badges, and it was quite clear that neither side was about to convince the other.

Mutual incomprehension extends to the nature of the man just elected. Trump folk streaming from Union Station to the Capitol passed protestors holding placards reading “Impeach Trump Now”, for they are certain that the new president is a criminal. Talking to those same Trump folk, Lexington asked why they had travelled so far to see his inauguration, and heard praise for a man of transformative virtues.

Steve Glorioso and his wife Irene, who own a small graphics business in Baltimore, Maryland, said that they expect him to bring work back from overseas. Mr. Glorioso added: “Trump makes me feel like a winner. Obama never seemed to put America first.” Kimberley Rae, from Tampa, Florida, said: “I love that Trump loves our military and respects them... Obama made our military smaller.” For Dan Lance and his family, from St Pete, Florida, his strength is that “he doesn’t talk that politically correct crap that everybody talks.” Asked for more details, Mr. Lance explained that he liked the new president’s candour on such subjects as illegal immigration.

Michelle Scallon of Windsor, Colorado, is confident that Mr. Trump will be guided by the Constitution, and “is going to do what’s right. He’s not going to let anyone buy him off.”

Many in the half of America that did not vote for Mr. Trump find such trust unfathomable. To many in the half of America that did vote for Mr. Trump, it is self-evident that the new president is their champion. His inaugural address did nothing to bring that divided America any closer together.

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