

We Are Dissidents; We Are Legion

Charles M. Blow, NY Times Opinion | JAN 23, 2017



Thousands of people demonstrated during the Women's March in Washington, D.C., on Saturday. Credit Hilary Swift for The New York Times

On Friday, Donald J. Trump, the embodiment, instrument and provocateur of American animus, was installed — and I use that word with purpose and displeasure — as America's 45th president. He delivered a particularly inauspicious speech to a [seemingly sparse crowd](#), presenting a vision for America that would best be described as aggressive atavism, a retrograde positioning of policy that threatens to drag the country back to a time of division and fear and hostility, when some stand in the light by casting others into darkness.

The speech was replete with phrases [never before uttered](#) in an Inaugural Address. Bleed, carnage, depletion and disrepair. Ripped, rusted and stolen. Tombstones, trapped and windswept. Urban, sad and Islamic. It felt at times as though he were reading aloud from a post-apocalyptic movie script.

Indeed, some have pointed out that portions of the speech [sounded eerily familiar](#) to one delivered by the movie villain Bane in the Batman movie "The Dark Knight Rises." Bane, too, promises: "We take Gotham from the corrupt! The rich! The oppressors of generations who have kept you down with myths of opportunity, and we give it back to you, the people," even as he plunges the fictitious city into chaos.

There were few overtures to his opponents, let alone his enemies, little attempt to seek unity and amity. The Dean of Discord made clear his purpose and his plan: It is not to bring America together but to rip it asunder.

[The Wall Street Journal](#) reported that the speech was partly written by Steve Bannon, Trump's white-nationalist chief strategist and senior counselor. At one point in the speech, Trump delivered the bewildering line: "When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice." Patriotism does not drive out prejudice; to the contrary, it can actually enshrine it. No one was more patriotic than our founding fathers, and yet most of the prominent founding fathers were slave owners.

Trump set forth a portentous proposition on Friday. Saturday's Women's Marches across the country and around the world answered with a thundering roar.

The marches, whose participants [vastly outnumbered](#) inauguration attendees, offered a stinging rebuke to the election of a man who threatens women's rights and boasts of grabbing women's genitalia.

And the marches, which included quite a few men and boys as well, also represented more than that. They were a rebuke of bigotry and a call for equality and inclusion. They demonstrated the awesome power of individual outrage joined to collective action. And it was a message to America that the majority did not support this president or his plans and will not simply tuck tail and cower in the face of the threat. This was an uprising; this was a fighting back. This was a resistance.

Members of Congress, laboring under the delusion that they operate with a mandate and feeling compelled to rubber-stamp Trump's predilections, should heed well [the message those marches sent on Saturday: You are on notice. America is ticked off.](#)

There has been much hand-wringing and navel gazing since the election about how liberalism was blind to a rising and hidden populism, about how identity politics were liberals' fatal flaw, about how Democrats needed to attract voters who were willing to ignore Trump's racial, ethnic and religious bigotry, his misogyny, and his xenophobia.

I call bunk on all of that.

I have given quite a few speeches since the election and inevitably some variation of this "reaching out" issue is raised in the form of a question, and my answer is always the same: The Enlightenment must never bow to the Inquisition.

Recognizing and even celebrating individual identity groups doesn't make America weaker; it makes America stronger. Acknowledging that identity groups have not always been — and indeed, continue not to be — treated equally in this country should not be a cause for agitation, but a call to action. Parity is not born of forced erasure but rather respectful subsumption.

[Janelle Monáe, singer and star of the acclaimed film "Hidden Figures,"](#) put it this way at the march in Washington: "Continue to embrace the things that make you unique, even if it makes others uncomfortable. You are enough. And whenever you're feeling doubt, whenever you want to give up, you must always remember to choose freedom over fear."

If my difference frightens you, you have a problem, not me. If my discussion of my pain makes you ill at ease, you have a problem, not me. If you feel that the excavation of my history presages the burial of yours, then you have a problem, not me.

It is possible that Trump has reactivated something President Obama couldn't maintain, and Hillary Clinton couldn't fully tap into: A unified, mission-driven left that puts bodies into the streets. The women's marches sent a clear signal: Your comfort will not be built on our constriction. We are America. We are loud, "nasty" and fed up. We are motivated dissidents and we are legion.

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(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added, but only to add analysis & clarification)