

Trump, in an Astonishing and Historic Personal Victory, Has Defeated the Press and Exposed Its Mendacity

By Conrad Black

There have been 59 inaugural addresses from the 40 men who have been elected president of the United States, and the only ones that are remembered even by historically minded people are both the inaugural addresses of Abraham Lincoln, “We must not be enemies,” and “With malice toward none;” Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself;” and John F. Kennedy’s “Ask not what your country can do for you.”



President Trump and the first lady, Melania Trump, at his first inauguration, January 20, 2017. Via Wikimedia Commons

There have been a slightly smaller number of farewell addresses from outgoing presidents but only George Washington’s warning against “entangling alliances,” and Dwight Eisenhower’s

concern about the military-industrial complex are widely remembered. We will get one of each in the next week.

Given the ethical frailties and the policy errors of the Biden administration, cautionary words about what the nation should look out for in the years ahead might be somewhat implausible as parting advice, especially if they were the familiar fatuous pieties about the dangers of making America great again.

In the rancorous and disappointing circumstances of the end of his regime, the country would probably be relatively appreciative if President Biden took a leaf from the book of President Lyndon Johnson when he left office at the height of the Vietnam War in 1969 and gave a generous reminiscence about his 37 years in Washington, rising from a congressional gallery doorman all the way up what Benjamin Disraeli called "the greasy pole."

Mr. Biden has been a Washington fixture for more than 50 years and such an address might help close the book on lawfare, the less distinguished activities of the Biden family, and the nasty controversies of the last four years, and focus usefully on the concept of public service. Mr. Biden has never been a spellbinder and as he departs office his best bet may be to play to the strengths of his great experience and amicable personality. Most people will wish him well.

The return of President Trump is naturally a vastly different event, a vindication certainly, and one where the world will be listening closely to ascertain whether the returning president's mood is vindictive, triumphalist, or suffused with his recent and very possibly well-founded predictions of a new "Golden Age" for America.

The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East and the unusually rancorous tenor of American political discourse in the last eight years, in which Mr. Trump assaulted the bipartisan soft

left and, as he claimed, excessively elitist consensus and was outrageously persecuted and defamed as having Nazi tendencies contributed to the greatest climates of political acrimony since the Vietnam-Watergate era, if not the bottom of the Great Depression, or even the Civil War.

In the almost miraculous manner that American elections can achieve by evoking a huge number of intense controversies to a single question determined this year by 155 million voters, with no significant allegations of electoral irregularities, the atmosphere in the country has already in the two months since the election evolved to cautious hopefulness from anger and anxiety.

All well-adjusted people prefer to be hopeful than angry and a great deal of the absurdly and unjustly exaggerated criticism of Trump was based on the false theory that he is a dangerous man who incites and enjoys violence, although the claims of his first term that he was a racist and a misogynist have ceased: evaporated in the conspicuous absence of a scintilla of supporting evidence.

It would be out of character and a jolting change of pace if Trump were suddenly to proclaim that with his return to the White House, all is well and he has metamorphosed into a beaming Pollyanna. A positive recitation of his policy goals, upbeat but without the hyperbole that often comes naturally to a quality Manhattan developer, would be another long step toward disarming, and even shaming the serried ranks of his rabid media critics.

Trump has defeated the press and exposed the traditionally most influential media outlets as so dishonest and unprofessional that they have infected and corroded their own franchises and squandered the trust that the majority of Americans formally placed in them. The returning president, in an astonishing and historic personal victory over great odds in a partially rigged competition, has won that competition

and rubbed the noses of his media enemies in their own mendacity.

If he were to continue his post-electoral policy of jovially rising above past antagonism and boldly striking out on a path of determined and plausible optimism, seeking to subsume past discord into a consensus for progress though not, in current parlance, "progressive," it would disarm his remaining critics. It would greatly encourage the millions of people who overcame some misgivings about Trump as much from reservations about the alternative as from conviction that he is the best possible candidate.

Even most of his opponents acknowledge that Trump has executed the greatest political comeback in American history and has demonstrated extraordinary courage and determination and tactical political skill. Although it was a reasonably close election, because he was so heavily outspent and faced such wall-to-wall bigoted hostility from the national political press, his victory has been as brilliant as the greatest landslides of FDR (1936), LBJ (1964), Nixon (1972), and Reagan (1984).

Mr. Trump is not a great orator like Lincoln or Roosevelt or Reagan, but he is a formidable political leader and executive and a strong, positive, but sober message this Inauguration Day will give his second administration the excellent launch it deserves.

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