

# Meryl Streep, Donald Trump and the Golden Globes

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At the Golden Globes awards ceremony in Beverly Hills, California on Sunday, actress Meryl Streep criticized President-elect Donald Trump as a bully, someone who possessed “the instinct to humiliate” and lacked “empathy.” Trump, as is his habit, tweeted an ignorant response, calling Streep “one of the most over-rated actresses in Hollywood” and a “Hillary [Clinton] flunky.” The exchange has been endlessly covered in the media.

Streep’s various supporters and admirers in Hollywood and the media termed her comments “epic,” “powerful,” “gutsy,” “rousing,” “glorious,” “inspirational,” “brilliant,” “stinging,” “provocative” and “heroic.”

In fact, the actress’s remarks at the Golden Globes, an annual event organized by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, were quite mild and limited. On hand to receive the Cecil B. DeMille honorary award for “outstanding contributions to the world of entertainment,” Streep first took note of earlier comments by British actor Hugh Laurie.

Accepting an award for best supporting performance in a series, miniseries or television film (*The Night Manager*), Laurie half-joked, “I’ll be able to say I won this at the last-ever Golden Globes. I don’t mean to be gloomy; it’s just that it has the words ‘Hollywood,’ ‘Foreign’ and ‘Press’ in the title.” The actor, who played an arms dealer and criminal in the miniseries, later accepted his award “on behalf of psychopathic billionaires everywhere.”

Streep endorsed Laurie’s comments, noting that “all of us in this room... belong to the most vilified segments in American society right now. Think about it. Hollywood, foreigners and the press. But who are we? And, you know, what is Hollywood, anyway? It’s just a bunch of people from other places... So Hollywood is crawling with outsiders and foreigners. And if we kick ‘em all out, you’ll have nothing to watch but football and mixed martial arts, which are not the arts.”

She went on to praise the various performances honored this year, but observed that there was “one performance this year that stunned me... [and] sank its hooks in my heart.” This, Streep explained, was “when the person asking to sit in

the most respected seat in our country imitated a disabled reporter, someone he outranked in privilege, power and the capacity to fight back.” Streep was referring to Trump’s November 2015 mocking of *New York Times* reporter Serge Kovalski, who suffers from arthrogryposis, which causes joint contracture.

The actress suggested that “this instinct to humiliate, when it’s modeled by someone in the public platform, by someone powerful, it filters down into everybody’s life, because it kind of gives permission for other people to do the same thing.” She continued, “Disrespect invites disrespect. Violence incites violence. When the powerful use their position to bully others, we all lose.” She thereupon appealed to the press “to hold power to account, to call them on the carpet for every outrage.”

Streep has every right to criticize Trump, a bully and much more. Her reference to attacks on foreigners, artists and the “liberal” media suggests a certain sensitivity to the character of right-wing populism and even the history of the emergence of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s.

As a human type, Streep obviously belongs in a different category than the president-elect. The generally positive response to her comments, excluding right-wing media outlets, testifies to the fact that concerns over the emergence of Trump are widely felt. Even before he takes office, the incoming president has generated broad suspicion and contempt, stocking his “outsiders” cabinet with billionaires, former generals and assorted reactionaries.

However, the basis of the actress’s opposition—and liberal Hollywood’s overall—is neither substantial nor genuinely principled and does not give a lead to the mass opposition that will emerge to the Trump administration.

Well-to-do layers in the film and entertainment industry have a close relationship with the Democratic Party. Streep was a prominent speaker at last year’s Democratic National Convention, which nominated the corrupt warmonger Clinton.

Streep made a thoroughly banal and establishment speech there, in which she paid tribute to America’s “female firsts,”

including US Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, Democratic Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm and Secretary of State Madeline Albright. Streep declared that Clinton "will be our first woman president. And she will be a great president."

For eight years, Hollywood has been almost universally and vocally enthusiastic in its support for Barack Obama, even as his administration has run roughshod over democratic rights, prosecuted one bloody neo-colonial war after another, killed thousands with drones, and presided over a massive stock market bonanza for the rich. Where was Streep and the others when the Obama administration persecuted whistleblowers, drew up "kill lists" and ordered the assassination without due process of American citizens? Why did no one call Obama and his officials "on the carpet" for their "outrages"? This record of sordid acquiescence, frankly, diminishes the moral force of Hollywood liberals' present critique of Trump.

One has every right to be critical of Streep's criticism. How deep does it go? Time alone will tell, but, based on historical experience, one has the suspicion that many in the entertainment world—if not perhaps Streep herself—will find the ways and means to accommodate themselves to the Trump administration. This is a course, however, excluded for the vast majority of the population, including many of those who voted for the Republican candidate, who will come under unrelenting attack.

To a certain extent, the film and entertainment business has lifestyle and cultural differences with Trump, as it did with George W. Bush. The heyday of their leftism came under Bush and subsided dramatically with the election of Barack Obama. Anti-war slogans and signs were stored away. Sadly, Obama made their hearts beat a little faster.

No doubt, many in the film and music world genuinely despise Trump, but one of the problems in the contemporary culture is that there is much focus and over-emphasis on what celebrity figures like Streep (or Leonardo DiCaprio, or George Clooney or Tom Hanks) say and do.

Fine actors have an extraordinary gift, one that sets them apart to a certain extent. However, this unusual aptitude, which enables the best of them to feel a situation and atmosphere quite profoundly, is not often accompanied by any great insight into politics and social life. They can feel, but they do not necessarily understand.

In this lack of understanding, of course, they are hardly alone. There is a great deal of popular confusion about Trump, Clinton and the state of American politics.

Streep's comments, in short, reflect a mood, but not deep insight. And they should not be confused with an expression of deep popular anger and discontent. The vast resistance to come will emerge from somewhere else.

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As a side note, the attack on Streep in *Jacobin*, one of the voices of the liberal left, requires a brief comment. The piece, by Eileen Jones, is headlined "Against Streep," and carries the underline, "Meryl Streep's speechifying at the Golden Globes was the worst thing to happen since Trump's election."

It is a heavy-handedly sarcastic and subjective article, driven by resentment and, one can only conclude, a degree of envy.

"I may have to take today off work," Jones writes, "just to recover from this latest onslaught of Streepian solipsism embraced by the world as the height of Hollywood ethics... The way she condemned the 'performance' of Donald Trump when he mocked disabled *New York Times* reporter Serge Kovaleski... was truly righteous, wasn't it? She's so *classy*, isn't she?"

The *Jacobin* film critic goes on to claim that for decades Streep has been "Hollywood's imperious snob-appeaser," appearing in a series of "high-toned roles" and receiving "rave reviews" from "besotted critics." In the face of "titled" performers from England, "Americans can always point with pride to Meryl Streep, our very own homegrown acting royalty with as snooty an accent as any of them!"

Jones writes, "If I seem bitter, it's because I was raised on this Streep, and she has haunted my life with her high-and-mighty blonde heft and Yale Drama School ways. As an undergraduate, I was one of only two people in America who hated her, hated her with a passion." The article proceeds along these venomous lines, without an ounce of genuine analysis or insight.

The faux-populism here is nasty and out of place. Frankly, the comment is reminiscent in its tone and thrust of Trump's own remarks.



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