

US media on inauguration day: Toadyism, triviality, social blindness

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In its coverage of the Donald Trump inauguration and surrounding events, the American media performed as expected: horribly, with a combination of toadyism, triviality and social obliviousness. Its well-heeled and generally ignorant representatives did little or nothing to alert the American people to the dangers expressed in Trump's fascistic inaugural rant.

As noted, there is nothing unexpected in this. Over the past several decades, any spirit of political opposition or criticism in the mainstream press and television outlets has entirely evaporated. Leading television anchors and journalists belong to the richest one or two percent of the population. Covering Washington politics, they essentially constitute one element of the wealthy elite reporting on another.

The sycophancy and stupidity began early on. In his 3am report, CNN's John Berman intoned, "We are just before dawn in Washington [actually, some four hours before], just before the dawn of the Trump presidency. The sun will rise this morning with one commander in chief and will set with another. The peaceful transfer of power [is] really one of the hallmarks of our democracy."

The only "controversy" picked up on by CNN at his hour concerned the pastor selected to preach at a private service attended by Trump and company at 8:30am at St. John's Episcopal Church, "[ultra-rightist] Robert Jeffress, a southern Baptist who has a long history of inflammatory remarks about Muslims, Mormons, Catholics and gays," according to correspondent Athena Jones.

Quickly passing on, the cable network's Christine Romans, anchor of "Early Start," noted how enthralled she was by it all. "I think the one thing about a day like today is sort of the awesomeness of it. You know, and the word awesome is overused. This is what awesome is about. ... It gives me goose bumps. Really does. ..."

At every television network during the course of the day, the banal phrases would be repeated, including the slightly nervous one about the "peaceful transfer of power" as a "hallmark of our democracy."

A later dialogue between CNN's Sara Murray and the

dreadful Wolf Blitzer provided some of the general flavor of the media coverage. Asked by Blitzer about the private church service attended by Trump, Murray responded: "Well, Wolf, I'm told it was a very moving ceremony. And I just spoke with a friend of Donald Trump who said the moment is clearly hitting him. This person said that Donald Trump was clearly emotional, particularly as he was leaving the church. ... Donald Trump even appeared a little teary-eyed on his way out ... [I]t's clear that this day, this moment, the magnitude of it is beginning to sink in, Wolf."

Blitzer responded, "And will sink in even further as we get closer and closer to that magic moment."

The fierce tone of Trump's "American First" speech obviously startled some in the media. On Fox News, Brit Hume declared that the speech, was "not poetic, but quite strong, very much Trump." On the same panel, Chris Wallace suggested that there had not been a political transition, but a "seizure of power" by Trump, while Dana Perino blandly described the speech as "muscular." There was a "freshness" about the way Trump saw the country, according to Tucker Carlson.

The ultra-right Charles Krauthammer, also on Fox, pointed bluntly to how Trump's "America First" speech "has been heard" across the globe. He suggested that US "allies and trading partners" in particular had to be "quaking in their boots" after Trump's address. It was the "most aggressive, most sort of hyper-nationalist, and, in some way, the most hostile of any inaugural address, I think, since the Second World War."

Krauthammer pointed to Trump's "staggering" sentence, "The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed all across the world." The nationalist theme of the address was an "amazing message" for an inaugural address and would have a "huge effect" around the world.

Newspaper headlines Friday afternoon reflected concerns and anxiety. The *New York Times* responded: "With Echoes of the '30s, Trump Resurrects a Hard-Line Vision of 'America First.'" The *New Yorker* suggested, "A Dark

Inaugural,” and the *Washington Post*, “Trump’s inaugural speech was a sharp break with past—and his party.” The *Atlantic* pronounced, “‘American Carnage’: The Trump Era Begins.”

None of these liberal publications offer any serious explanation for the ultra-nationalist policies of the new president or how it was that such a repugnant figure managed to win the White House. According to the same publications now, Barack Obama is a nearly flawless human being, beloved by millions. Then why did the Democratic Party vote decline so sharply? These people are very distant from popular suffering and discontent.

Whatever concerns there were in the media about Trump’s tone and content, the television networks had gotten back to the business of chloroforming the public by the time of the miserable “Inaugural Parade”—a convoy of menacing vehicles surrounded by secret service agents driving down avenues lined with police and other “law enforcement.” Meager crowds chanted “USA! USA!,” waved flags and held up signs thanking Trump for “saving America.”

On CBS News, with additional time to kill because the pace of the parade was “off” and with nothing much to say anyway, the commentators were reduced to discussing possible renovations of the White House’s Oval Office and the beauty of that office’s famous “Resolute Desk,” a gift from Queen Victoria.

Obama had written a letter for his successor, “a wonderful tradition,” and stuck it in the Resolute Desk. (Meanwhile, the bleak procession continued.) “Speaking of hats,” President Dwight Eisenhower had broken tradition in 1953 by wearing a fedora.

On NBC, a few moments of seriousness were devoted to a discussion of the inaugural address. It was agreed the speech was the work of Steve Bannon, Trump’s senior counselor, whom no one cared to identify as an extreme right-winger. “Steve Bannon and Donald Trump have channeled each other. He [Bannon] believes in this nationalist movement” in various parts of the world.

“The crowds are waving. ... There’s a lot of excitement here.” The convoy looked as uninviting as before.

ABC’s commentators were whiling away the time by wondering what was in the box [“A Tiffany box?”] that “Melania” had given “Michelle.”

Someone pointed out that holding events at Trump’s Washington, D.C. hotel was a “howling conflict of interest.” In response, the correspondent on the spot explained Trump’s point of view: “It’s not illegal, it’s his hotel, he can do what he wants.” There you go!

The parade dragged interminably on. “What we’re seeing here is peaceable and joyful.” The question of the hour was, would Trump and family exit the limousine and walk part of

the route? A female commentator, “I hope he does. ... It’s important. ... It shows he’s one of the people.” Everyone agrees. It would also be “a demonstration of vigor.” He is, someone noted, the oldest president at the time of his first inauguration, and in recent times, “the heaviest.”

CNN’s correspondents were abuzz when the massive limousine did indeed halt, in front of the Trump International Hotel, which the real estate mogul rents from the US General Services Administration. Trump got out and waved to the crowd. “Robin [Meade], can you see the president?” “We’re really close.” “Let’s listen to the crowd.” “USA! USA!”

The Trumps climbed back in their monster vehicle after a few moments. It was, the CNN reporters agreed, “an incredible moment.” “This is a family affair,” what with Melania “in her beautiful robin’s egg blue suit” and “the tall handsome son.” Speaking of the son, one CNN reporter observed, “Even with all the money the Trumps have, this is new for him!”

Correspondent Meade told her viewers, “There are protests, but, all in all, such a warm reception ... a great moment. Will they get out again?”

Back to Fox, where one analyst pointed out that the speech had not been “as unifying” as one might have expected and the crowds were smaller than predicted. Getting out “right in front of a property he owns” marked Trump’s different way of doing things. This was a president who was a master at marketing, at branding. After all, following one or another of his bankruptcies, he had “used the Howard Stern show to keep himself relevant.” Family and “foreign entities” had helped him out. Mitt Romney and the *New York Post* had once called Trump a “con man,” now they were obliged to call him “Mr. President.”

Despite any misgivings, the Fox correspondent declared, “A great day for American democracy.” The “orderly, peaceful transition of power ... helps soothe the soul.”

The venal, cowardly American media enters into the Trump era as a chief facilitator of reaction.



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