

Triumphal Divisions: Trump's State of the Union Address

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*In this year of the presidential elections, **President Donald J. Trump** shows little sign of cowering. It had been some time in coming, but here was a businessman talking to a Congress long in the pocket of business, a seemingly seamless order of things that would have made the Founding Fathers cringe.*

Trump's rule has remade political practice in the United States. Protocols have been abandoned; forms torn. The language of politics is sillier, barrel scraping and coarse, the lingo of the tweet, rather than the elevation of inspired ideas. His enemies have become poor facsimiles of the Trump method, and for this, he must always be remembered.

Damning protocol was already something Trump was keen on even before he began his speech. He [turned his back](#) on **House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's** outstretched hand. It was not a level of rudeness to be batted away with magisterial indifference; Pelosi was keen to show that she was more than able to abandon convention and reciprocate with similar childishness. She refused to use the language of customary introduction – that it was her “honour” to introduce the president. At the conclusion of his speech, [she tore up the speech](#) in view of the cameras. It was, she explained to journalists, “the courteous thing to do, considering the alternatives.”

The Democrats have never quite nailed down a program of getting at Trump the showman. They lament his mendacity, which he can always turn into a weapon, deployed as brief stabs over the social media cycle; they loathe his character, which he can always rebrand as daring in the face of fetters that encourage dreariness. Shockingly, the opposition seems grey, haggard, stilted and, at points, decidedly confused. (The Iowa caucus fiasco did not help.) By vote, they impeached him in the House of Representatives, where they were bound to, given that they control the chamber. By vote, they are bound to fail to remove him from office in the Senate trial that concludes on Wednesday.

[Trump's speech](#), billed as the “Great American Comeback”, took deep bites out of the economy mantra, fictional as it is. “Jobs are booming, incomes are soaring, poverty is plummeting, crime is falling, confidence is surging, and our country is thriving and highly respected again!” He stressed high velocity, speedy movement, the sort of subject matter US presidents luxuriate in. “We are moving forward at a pace that was unimaginable just a short time ago, and we are never going back!” What this entails is less relevant than the illusion of busy dedication. “In just three short years, we have shattered the mentality of American decline and we have rejected the downsizing of America's destiny.”

The president also took a chance to dare and prod his opponents in the House. He made it clear that the Presidential Medal of Freedom would be awarded to Rush Limbaugh, a radio

demagogue who has revealed he has advanced lung cancer. Having rewarded a figure with well proven credentials in divisiveness, he explained that he was himself the leader of inclusivity. “The next step forward in building an inclusive society is making sure that every young American gets a great education and the opportunity to achieve the American dream.”

His project for the US involved constructing “the world’s most prosperous and inclusive society – one where every citizen can join in America’s unparalleled success, and where every community can take place in America’s extraordinary rise.”

That prosperous society evidently entailed not having universal healthcare but a good deal of private healthcare directed away from rogue illegal aliens who seemed to be finding themselves in the United States, despite Trump’s own claims that the US-Mexico border is resoundingly secure. Unconvincingly, Trump suggested that 130 lawmakers “in this chamber have endorsed legislation that would bankrupt our Nation by providing free taxpayer-funded healthcare to millions of illegal aliens, forcing taxpayers to subsidize free care for anyone in the world who unlawfully crosses our borders.”

By right of reply, the opposition duties for this year fell to Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. “Bullying people on Twitter doesn’t fix bridges – it burns them.” What the governor has failed to appreciate here is that bridges have a solidity a tweet does not. A set of rapidly fired words furnish fantastic distractions that can be altered at a moment’s pressing. Lacking punch, even Trump critics [found Whitmer’s speech tedious](#).

Trump’s speeches are never to be taken as factual representations. They are merely signposted sentiments and crude displays. Unemployment is low, but job security in the United States is precarious. The stock market has been booming, but that ignores the massive underwritten expansion that arose from the injection of public moneys into the economy during the Obama years. The fiction of a healthy Wall Street independent, daring and free of the state remains a delusion with high circulation. Trump is by no means the only one to advertise that nonsense, which assures companies that their losses will be socialised, and their profits treated as acts of ingenious self-achievement.

The timing of the address was also significant, becoming a display of of both the man himself and the system he represents. On Wednesday, his impeachment trial will conclude with a Senate vote, and he is likely to remain in place. Pelosi’s rudeness was put down, in part, to the hope that she will not preside over another State of the Union from Trump. She may well live to regret saying so. The White House is certainly reminding her of that fact, [claiming](#) that the act of tearing Trump’s speech was tantamount to ripping up, “The survival of our last surviving Tuskegee Airmen”, survival of a child born at 21 weeks, families in mourning, and a “service member’s reunion with his family.” Shallow and flawed reasoning, but substantive enough to sell.

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