

Trump's Inaugural of Optimism

He begins his second term with a far better message than in 2017.

By [The Editorial Board](#)



Journal Editorial Report: We consider the presidential to-do list. Photo: Alex Brandon/Associated Press

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[Donald Trump](#) was never going to deliver Lincoln's second inaugural address—no one else has either—but on Monday the 45th and now 47th President delivered a message of aspiration and optimism that most Americans will welcome. If this captures his real plans, he has a chance to leave office in four years as a success.

“The golden age of America begins right now,” Mr. Trump said in his first words after noting the dignitaries in attendance. “From this moment on, America's decline is over.”

The contrast couldn't be greater from his “American carnage” inaugural of 2017. That speech responded to the Democratic and media resistance to his election with the same dark tone that set the stage for four years of rancor and division. The tone and message of this inaugural was that America has always been great and will be greater as it meets new challenges. This speech was more [Elon Musk](#) and much less Steve Bannon, and all for the better.

This being Donald Trump, there was an inevitable list of grievances about the administration he is succeeding. If anyone expected a grace note toward President Biden or [Kamala Harris](#), there wasn't one. (And give them credit for showing up after a defeat, unlike Mr. Trump four years ago.)

“For many years, a radical and corrupt establishment has extracted power and wealth from our citizens, while the pillars of our society lay broken and seemingly in complete disrepair,” Mr. Trump said, with typical hyperbole.

But he is right that government has too often failed Americans in its essential duty of providing for public safety and basic services even as it grows ever larger. As we have learned from evidence in court, the Biden White House also used its power to stifle critics on social media. Ending this censorship regime is one of the election's best results.

The speech was also notable for linking the best of America's past with ambitions for the future. This connection is crucial to an American revival. For years, our cultural and political leaders have lectured Americans that their society is rife with “systemic racism,” that it was founded not on freedom but the desire to own slaves, and that it mostly spreads destruction around the world.

Mr. Trump praised the past of America's “explorers, builders, innovators, entrepreneurs and pioneers.” He also invoked the core American value of “a society that is colorblind and merit-based.” Americans need to believe again in the essential goodness of their country—its exceptionalism, if we can use a disfavored word—to forge a better future.

Perhaps the most important lines in Mr. Trump's speech were his promise to end politically motivated prosecutions. "Never again will the immense power of the state be weaponized to persecute political opponents, something I know something about," he said. "We will not allow that to happen. It will not happen again. Under my leadership, we will restore fair, equal and impartial justice under the constitutional rule of law."

That couldn't be clearer, and the contrast with the Biden years (see nearby) is refreshing. If he means this, despite his occasional campaign rhetoric, he will help the country and his Presidency by avoiding a retribution drive that will be a political dead-end.

More than most inaugural addresses, Mr. Trump's speech was focused on some of his initial policy directives. And it's clear that, unlike his first term, he has a more sure-footed sense of what he wants to do and how to do it. He needs to move fast because he can't run for re-election.

But one note of caution is that Mr. Trump said he will declare not one, but two, national emergencies—on border security and energy. This will give him more authority to use executive power and dispatch federal resources. But what is the "energy" emergency?

Such declarations should be saved for real emergencies, and Mr. Trump doesn't need special powers to accomplish his goals on either of these priorities. They enhance the administrative state, rather than limit it as he has promised. Recall how the left wanted Mr. Biden to declare a "climate" emergency.

American democracy is said to be under threat these days, but if Monday is a guide perhaps less than many think. Opponents were respectful of the transfer of power, the mood solemn but also joyful for Trump partisans. Trump II is off to a better start than we might have imagined only a few months ago.

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