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Democracy Dies in Darkness



'I believe I am treated worse,' Trump says. As if.

By **Dana Milbank**

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Allow me to share some frank thoughts about the president:

The orangutan in the White House is less refined than a savage. He is a fool, an irresolute, vacillating imbecile. He is an idiot, of low intellectual capacity. He is a barbarian, a yahoo, a gorilla — the original gorilla — and an unshapely man. He is horrid-looking, a scoundrel, a creature fit, evidently, for petty treasons.

He is dishonest. He is unjust. He has no principle, no respect for law. In his administrative madness, on his unconstitutional crusade, he uses the power of government to crush. His presidency is despotism, a dictatorship, a monstrous usurpation, a criminal wrong and an act of national suicide.

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The American people are in no mood to reelect a man to the highest office whose daily language is indecent. His speech is coarse, colloquial, devoid of ease and grace, and bristling with outrages against the simplest rules of syntax. His silly remarks are flat and dishwatery utterances. It wouldn't be easy to produce anything more dull and commonplace — awkwardly expressed and slipshod, so loose-jointed, so puerile. Lacking in dignity or patriotism, his words would have caused a Washington to mourn and would have inspired a Jefferson, Madison or Jackson with contempt.

A leader of incapacity and rottenness, he has taken us on a wicked and hazardous experiment. He lacks practical talent and capacity for government. He is an old joker. He is weak as water, a man of canting hypocrisy. He sickens us. If he is reelected I shall immediately leave the country.

The administration thus far has not met public expectations. He has brought on us national humiliation, leaving the cheek of every American to tingle with shame. After four years of usurpation, of lawless, reckless misgovernment, he should be removed from office.

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He is ultimately to be classed among the catalog of monsters, of foolish and incompetent kings and emperors. He will go down as the man who could not read the signs of the times, who couldn't understand the circumstances and interests of his country, who failed without excuses and fell without a friend.

At this point, I should mention that the president these words refer to is Abraham Lincoln. They are examples of contemporaneous criticism of the Great Emancipator from the newspapers of the day, strung together with minor changes. Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer of Hunter College, author of "Lincoln and the Power of the Press," provided me with many of the quotes; several others came from Michael Burlingame's Lincoln biography.

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I put them together, omitting telltale references to Honest Abe and 19th-century colloquialisms, so that readers could test for themselves the veracity of President Trump's claim at the Lincoln Memorial Sunday night: "I am greeted with a hostile press, the likes of which no president has ever seen. The closest would be that gentleman right up there. They always said, 'Lincoln — nobody got treated worse than Lincoln.' I believe I am treated worse."

Only a man of Trump's peculiar sense of victimhood could believe that he has been "treated worse" than a predecessor killed by an assassin's bullet. And a review of press criticism of Lincoln confirms, as expected, that Trump's self-pity is as silly as it sounds.

But the review produced something unexpected, too: As wrong as Lincoln's newspaper critics were in judging the 16th president, they were eerily prescient in anticipating the failings of the 45th.

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