

1. **Mark your confusion.**
2. **Show evidence of a close reading.**
3. **Write a 1+ page reflection.**

Here are two very different reactions to Donald Trump's inaugural address:

Donald Trump's Inaugural Address Was Great

Source: James Poulos, TheWeek.com, January 21, 2017

President Donald Trump's inaugural address was a great American speech.

He delivered a greatest hits of American mottos, from Theodore Roosevelt's doctrine of action to Franklin Roosevelt's admonition against fear. He echoed Bill Clinton's promise that whatever's wrong with America can be fixed by what's right with America, even riffing on Bubba's signature line about feeling your pain. Trump summoned Ronald Reagan's familiar invocation of the shining city on a hill. But he also brought back the tropes of an older America, one where grinding struggle and reversals of national fortune defined the spirit of the age. For Trump, "America first" is once again not a principle of vanity or greed, but of grim necessity.

So Trump rebuked the great Americanism of what, until Election Day, had been the country's comfortable class. But of all America's animating themes, one went conspicuously missing from Trump's speech. Despite a lifetime promoting "the art of the deal," Trump abandoned the language of bargaining to address our nation of bargainers. Of all the talk of greatness, our American-as-apple-pie vision of "great deals" was utterly absent.

That silence was thunderous.

"You came by the tens of millions to become part of a historic movement," our new president told the people, "the likes of which the world has never seen before." And indeed, for the first time in living memory, public sentiment in the United States — down to its roots as a *commercial* republic — has turned against commerce as an organizing principle of unity. Tocqueville observed that Americans experienced "a kind of heroism" in "their way of doing commerce;" with "heroes and gods" receding from cultural view, they "really only [got] excited by the sight of themselves." Our cult of competition, which long tended toward conformity for the very many and breakthroughs for the very few, kept hold over the American spirit through good times and bad. As secularism and individualism increased, our identity as a primarily commercial people threatened to become the sole fixed point in our hearts. But now? It too has been disenchanted.

How could *that* happen? On Trump's telling, it's simple: betrayal. "The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed all across the world." America's commercial elites exploited the people, shattering what has so long been the core of our identity. No wonder the present moment, despite our remaining advantages, feels defined by such fractious, aimless, and depressing "American carnage." No wonder the people's demands — and horizons — have been lowered so dramatically to the basics. Talk about grim necessity: "Americans want great schools for their children, safe neighborhoods for their families, and good jobs for themselves. These are just and reasonable demands of righteous people and a righteous public."

But we can never withdraw from the world in reaction. For, regardless of our policies, the character of America, more than that of any other nation, colors the character of the world. In a darkening, more hostile world, the American people need more than deliverance at the lowest, most primal level. They need to rebalance control of the technology of commerce away from their deeply misguided elite. It is not globalization that ails us, but a specific form of global commercialism rooted in the biggest speculation by the fewest players on the biggest bubbles — inside bets around intangible phantoms like the minute-to-minute market value of basketed debts and branded algorithms. The first step to making America great again is to reorient commerce and its instruments — from transportation to energy, on Earth and beyond — around "real Americans" in the literal sense: flesh-and-blood human beings, sharing our lives in the physical world, for whom money and science must forever be servants, not masters.

This is the imperative that follows from the logic of Trump's speech. Daunting as the odds may be, they should focus our minds — and hearts — in the difficult years to come.

Don't Believe the Populism of Trump's Inaugural Address. Our President Is a Plutocrat.

Source: Ryan Cooper, TheWeek.com, January 21, 2017

It's official: Donald Trump is now president of the United States.

President Trump's inaugural address was — by his usual standards, at least — relatively restrained and moderate. He thanked the Obamas for their help, and disavowed prejudice, saying that "whether we are black, brown, or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots."

But it wasn't all exactly inclusive feel-goodery. Hardly.

The major theme of Trump's speech was the same fearsome and bleak brand of populism that animated his campaign. He described factories "scattered like tombstones across the land," and lamented supposed plagues of "drugs" and "gangs."

"This American carnage stops right here and stops right now," America's new president vowed.

Of course, Trump presented himself as the savior to solve all our problems, the personification of the restoration of democratic legitimacy over a self-dealing Washington establishment. "We are transferring power from Washington, D.C., and giving it back to you, the people," he said.

It's a noble sentiment — and an open fraud.

To my jaundiced left-wing ears, Trump's evisceration of the moneyed elite rang uncomfortably true. He lamented the very real fact that the Washington area (especially the suburbs of northern Virginia) has become incredibly rich while de-industrialization has devastated vast swathes of the hinterlands. "Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered, but the jobs left and the factories closed.

The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of the country." While this is an unfair reading of the *entirety* of the Obama years, for a huge fraction of the country — beset by outsourcing, foreclosure, opioid addiction, falling homeownership, and stagnant or declining wages — it's also a lived reality.

These are real problems, and despite his borderline-apocalyptic rhetoric, Trump is at least theoretically right to skewer America's past leaders for failing to solve them.

However, there is precisely zero sign that America's 45th president is going to do anything to make good on his fiercely populist promises.

On the contrary, every action he's taken so far signals the opposite. His Cabinet is filled with wealthy bankers and donors to the Republican Party. Every agency designed to protect citizens is going to be staffed with zealous partisans of the predatory businesses they are supposed to oversee. Trump's budget — copy-pasted from the ultraconservative Heritage Foundation — promises incomprehensible amounts of austerity, so that stinking rich people like Donald Trump might pay less in taxes.

Consider health care, obviously a major political focus during the Obama years. During the campaign, journalists conducted many interviews with Trump voters on ObamaCare who were frustrated they could not get access to Medicaid (largely the fault of their own Republican governors and/or a very flawed law), and just blindly trusted Trump to come up with some better system. Something "terrific," surely.

These people are about to get run over by a train.

Congressional Republicans are preparing to repeal ObamaCare, and have no plans whatsoever to replace it with anything even halfway decent. On the contrary, the Heritage budget includes additional savage cuts to Medicare (41 percent) and Medicaid (47 percent) over the next decade. If passed, tens or perhaps hundreds of thousands of people will be killed due to lack of insurance. Why? So that stinking rich people like Donald Trump might pay less in taxes.

Even on trade, Trump's signature issue, there's little he can do given that most manufacturing jobs have already been outsourced or automated away. And there's little sign he is actually interested in the industrial policy and careful renegotiation of trade deals that would restore American competitiveness (instead of sparking a zero-sum trade war). Almost his first act as president was to make it harder for people to buy a house:

So what can you expect from the Trump administration? Endless tweets about tiny handfuls of jobs President Trump is "protecting" here and there, presented in a rhetorical facade of faux-populism, while corporate America runs wild in an orgy of corruption and looting. Some populist.

Possible Response Questions:

- Watch Trump's speech online and share your reaction to it.
- Pick a passage from the two opinion pieces and respond to it.
- Discuss the writer's craft in either or both of these pieces.