

President Trump: la-la land still doesn't get the big disrupter

By Janet Albrechtsen, The Australian, 22 January 2017

Crossing Fifth Avenue on to East 57th Street in New York this past week, a policeman manning the corner grunts a rhetorical: "Where ya' goin'?" Everyone passing through the inquisition is headed to one place — the 58-storey Trump Tower between East 56th and East 57th.

The shining gold tower that once screamed the success of a celebrity businessman now marks the remarkable arrival of Donald J. Trump, 45th President of the United States.

A few metres beyond the corner, a young blonde employee from the nearby Chanel store complains sales have plunged 38 per cent because gun-toting police, guard rails and cement blocks impede the joy of shopping. Her moan about Chanel losing money won't echo beyond the Manhattan bubble.

A few steps further, at the entrance to Trump's golden tower, a mother barks at her young son to look happy as she photographs him standing near half a dozen of New York's finest holding machineguns, with fingers close to the triggers.

"But I'm not happy. You haven't bought me anything," the child grumbles, oblivious to what all the fuss is about.

Inside, it's arguable whether the permanent posse of journalists filling the foyer with their cameras pointed at the gold elevators comprehend what the fuss is about either. A coup for them is The Donald stepping out from the elevator.

He's done that just five times in two months, a journalist tells me. Most days, they are lucky to see a visitor to Trump's 26th-floor office.

A wider and longer lens is needed to understand why Trump has become President of the US. Start by juxtaposing Hollywood's latest offering, *La La Land*, with *Hillbilly Elegy*, a book that sits at No 1 on *The New York Times*' bestseller list.

The former is a movie by Hollywood about Hollywood and lauded by Hollywood's Golden Globe awards.

In fact, it's a second-rate, try-hard musical with an insipid plot and singing that wouldn't pass first-round auditions on *American Idol*. But in Hollywood they are going gaga over *La La*.

Hillbilly Elegy, by contrast, digs deep into an America that couldn't be further from the aptly named *La La Land*. It's a gritty, gut-wrenching memoir of a class of American outsiders worn down by lost jobs, cast adrift from a foreign culture, left behind by Wall Street and forgotten by Washington.

Without mentioning Trump's name, the book by JD Vance, a hillbilly from Kentucky, explains why millions of outsiders were drawn to another outsider, albeit a very wealthy one, who rose to become president.

More than anything else Trump said during his colourful and controversial campaign, a few words that resonated the most: "Drain the swamp." Three words that are as visual as they are visceral.

Trump's inauguration marks the triumph of the voiceless outsider over the self-proclaimed superior class.

After decades of being ignored by institutional elites, the primeval, gut reaction of outsiders was to teach the insider class a lesson. Big-time, by embracing a man who has altered not just the tone of politics but also the locus of political power, not to mention its method of operation. And that's why, not even a day in, Trump's presidency already demands a prominent place in history.

No political insider could get away with what Trump has said about everyone from Mexicans to Muslims, from fat people to prisoners of war. Who else but Trump could say that he prefers a soldier who is not taken prisoner by the enemy? Establishment politicians are trapped in a rule book they have written over decades. They would be fleeced, if not outright destroyed, by the first whiff of a possible pussy-grab or a spray at minorities or the obese.

Trump has been able to break every rule because millions of Americans were ready to look beyond the literal to the symbolic — a man taking on decades of political correctness, saying things with enough of a kernel of truth to resonate not just in hillbilly Appalachian territory but the suburbs of Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

While Democratic presidential heir apparent Hillary Clinton campaigned and partied with celebrities and rock stars, Trump's rise was fuelled by outright disdain for the sanctimonious ruling cartel that has hogged politics and hijacked culture for the past four decades.

Trump breaks the rules daily, hourly, even by the minute via Twitter not just because he is an outsider who can, but because the very breaking of the rules delivers him support from voters who have had enough of the DC rule book that has sidelined their concerns. From building a wall — a symbol of controlling borders — to speaking honestly about Islamic terrorism and blue-collar jobs sacrificed to globalisation, Trump understands human nature better than the professional political class.

When asked during a Tuesday interview on Fox News about celebrities who said they declined to attend or sing at his inauguration, Trump said they weren't invited. "I don't want the celebrities. I want the people." (Big tick.)

Trump slays every sacred cow of tone and substance with delight, understanding the more conniptions he causes to the Left, the more he secures his place as the outsider willing to drain the swamp of progressive pieties that long ago hijacked politics and culture from mainstream Americans.

This week when Obama commuted the 35-year sentence of Chelsea Manning (formerly Bradley Manning, before transitioning to a woman) who leaked almost 750,000 pages of highly classified information, it helped Trump. Also this week, business and political elites decamped to Davos on someone else's dime to schmooze. Davos delegates were invited to simulate life as a refugee by crawling around on hands and knees pretending to flee from persecution. That will help Trump.

Last week, *The New York Times Magazine* described Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, as "president-in-law". While political and media elites gnash teeth over Kushner becoming de facto president, beyond this bubble, it doesn't matter a jot that Kushner, another political outsider, will be one of Trump's closest and most trusted advisers.

The success of Trump's presidency won't hinge on Washington's rule book, and what media and political elites expect of him. His presidency will succeed or fail on whether he delivers to those ignored by Washington: creating jobs and boosting economic growth, controlling US borders, eschewing political correctness and staying true to what his presidency represents.

It's a political rupture that the la-la land Left is yet to understand.

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