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Media & Culture

Tony Broadbent Fri, 05 Jul 2019 10:35 GMT



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The vanity, mendacity, and militarism on display on the Washington Mall to mark the 4th of July, Independence Day, in the US capital, as orchestrated, nay, demanded by President Trump was utterly without precedent. And as the whole sorry spectacle unfolded before my disbelieving eyes I, for one, waited with baited breath for “Tank Man” to appear and make protest, against the dread military themed “show of a lifetime!” as promised in the self-satisfied Tweet of triumph Trump had posted just the day before.

“Tank Man”...the nickname awarded to the ‘unknown protestor’ to mark his extraordinary act of bravery in Beijing, on June 5, 1989. When, alone; and with nothing but a shopping bag in each hand; he stared down a column of battle tanks in Tiananmen Square. A singular gesture of protest against the Government’s crackdown, when after weeks of demonstrations, Chinese troops stormed the square, the previous day, and killed hundreds of students, intellectuals, and labour activists. “Tank Man” disappeared soon afterwards never to be seen or heard of again.

Yet, such was my angst I would have readily accepted a cardboard cut out image of “Tank Man.” Or better, yet, a brave soul or two; with attendant carrier bags; to vault over the steel crowd barriers and stand in front of the twin 30-ton Bradley infantry fighting vehicles on open display either side of Trump’s bullet-proof glass encased podium. The two 70-ton M1 Abrams tanks; massive beasts trucked in for the occasion on giant low-loaders; ultimately deemed much too heavy to be allowed to track onto the apron of the Lincoln Memorial and, rather more fittingly, reduced to bit-players and parked on the service road at the rear.

Come to think of it, I could have really done with a whole platoon of cardboard “Tank Man” cut outs to obscure all the Republican Party VIP’s invited to witness the show, sitting in artfully arranged serried ranks for the singular benefit of Fox’s television cameras. (Not a single Democrat was invited. Sad. But then, not one of them would have attended anyway.)

Yet with all the better comedy news shows sadly unavailable and unable to provide suitably biting satirical street theatre: ‘The Late Show with Stephen Colbert’ on hiatus for the week because of the National Holiday; no new episodes of Trevor Noah’s ‘Daily Show’ scheduled until mid-July; and ‘Saturday Night Live’ on interminable ‘Summer Reruns’; I had little hope of anything truly unexpected happening.

I still had a secret hope fellow-Brit John Oliver might dash out to stand in front of the Bradleys, adjust his glasses, and yell out: “Not tonight, Josephine!” or some other inspired non sequitur. But given such an action could well have put his legal status as a US ‘green card’ holder at risk, I let that hope quickly and quietly fa-fa-fade away.

Would that the remarkable Jon Stewart, the previous host of the ‘Daily Show’, make a repeat appearance in the nation’s capital, given he seems to be the only one in the entire country that can shame Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R) into doing anything even halfway remotely decent. As was evidenced, when he recently spoke before a Senate Committee with unbridled passion to plea for the continued funding of medical benefits for 9/11 first-responders, many of who have developed deadly cancers because of their work amidst the rubble of the Twin Towers.

Yet, after all that, the tanks didn't trundle down the Washington Mall, their tank-tracks gouging their unwanted presence into asphalt not made for such awesome displays of armed might. The Abrams and Bradley infantry fighting vehicles stood inert, engines off, mute witnesses to the travesty that is the would-dearly-love-to-be a dictator Trump.

All pomp and zero circumstance; unless it's the spectre of the continued erosion of all norms of democracy and decency; Trump's narcissistic display of military power devoid of any and all known American virtues.

Which is why I was particularly struck by what former CIA Director and Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, who served under President Barack Obama from 2011 to 2013, said when interviewed on CNN, last Tuesday night, about Trump's planned show of military might on the capital's streets: "It's not in keeping with what our country is all about. We know who we are, we know our strengths; and, very frankly, our view has always been that we should appreciate our liberties and our freedoms, because in a democracy the most important thing is that we protect the values that our country is all about. That doesn't mean we have to roll tanks down the street or roll troops down the street because we know who we are. We appreciate those that serve, but most importantly, we are all part of one family when it comes to America."

Panetta added that Trump's celebration definitely sent the wrong message. That the US was "not celebrating the Fourth of July for what it is, but rather a president who's trying somehow to emulate other authoritarian figures in the world that have to have these kind of parades in order to prove that somehow they are a powerful country. We've never had to do that."

High time for everyone of sound mind and judgement, here in the US, to pick a bone with the man who used family money and influence to wholly evade military service by dint of previously undiagnosed "bone-spurs."

The lesson for all Americans of sound mind who placed their right hands across their hearts at the raising of the Stars and Stripes and the stirring first bars of the US National Anthem: The Star-Spangled Banner. That the United States of America would do well to rid itself of its current self-serving sham of a President and make American democracy and all it has stood for at home—and around the world—truly great again.

In stark contrast to the bombast that is Trump, I can do nothing but urge you to take a moment or two out of your busy day and listen to a poem in honour of Independence Day penned and performed by the luminous, twenty-one-year-old Amanda Gorman; a young poet and activist from Los Angeles, California and the first person to be named the National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States.

Amanda Gorman's passion for the ideals upon which her country was built offer a far more fitting and compelling celebration of the US's extraordinary on-going experiment in democracy.

Her poem is, 'Believer's Hymn for the Republic', initially commissioned by CBS News, who then tasked The Boston Pops Orchestra and its conductor, Keith Lockhart, to provide a fitting musical accompaniment to the piece. And then so compelling was Miss Gorman at orchestra rehearsal that The Boston Pops duly asked her to perform with them as part of their annual July 4th nationally televised Independence Day celebration.

It's a most worthy birthday present and a fitting tribute to an already great country. And it bodes well for the future of the United States of America.

Click to watch: [Inaugural Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman Perform Her Independence Day](#) poem at a rehearsal with the Boston Pops Orchestra, as broadcast on 'CBS This Morning' on Wednesday 3rd June.

And nothing more for me to say now to my American cousins; with all due admiration, love, honour, and respect:

*"Oh say does that star spangled banner yet wave,*

*For the land of the free, and the home of the brave?"*

It most assuredly does if you're still a believer in all the things that went in to make the American Republic truly great in the first place and are willing to stand up and fight for them all over again and make your vote truly count in the coming US Presidential Elections in 2020.

**Disclaimer: Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of 7Dnews.**