

Commentary: Four ways America is greater, and you are welcome



Make America Great Again hats are for sale during a Governor's Day rally on Aug. 16, 2017, at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield. (Brian Cassella / Chicago Tribune)

By **Joanne Cleaver**

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Amid the hailstorm of lies, denials, do-overs and comb-overs, it can be difficult to suss out any residual good that the Trump presidency is showering on beleaguered Americans. Like a late-night snacker foraging in the refrigerator for an overlooked carton of takeout fried rice, I have read between the headlines to excavate a few silver linings. In no particular order, here are four presidential gifts that are making all of us greater Americans.

Civics! We're getting a crash course in how government works, and this will make most of us better citizens and voters. Snooze through your high school class on the powers of the executive branch? Not to worry, we're all playing catch-up as we yell back at the television after every sweep of the executive pen, "Wait, wait, can he do that?" Maybe yes, maybe no, but time and again, we scramble to find out. As the next national

election gears up, we will be better informed about the scope of the executive branch. When a candidate makes a promise, we'll know whether he or she can actually deliver, and if so, what it will take in terms of executive power, congressional finesse or judicial shenanigans. We're so much smarter now about how our country works!

Popular culture! How is the “The Manchurian Candidate” still a cultural touchpoint? The book was published in 1959, the good old days when people worked out all their differences at the drive-in by sharing burgers and fries. But now, the idea of an unwitting puppet who is remotely controlled by nefarious foreign powers is strangely relevant. I think we can all agree that our president has made nostalgia great again!

Vocabulary building! Quick quiz: What does treason really mean? What's a quisling? If a sentence is structured so that double negatives result in a positive, what's the net result of a triple negative? There's nothing like a bad example to bring out the suppressed third-grade grammar teacher lurking within us all. As we rapidly master new terms to describe the train wreck unfolding in the White House, we are becoming walking dictionaries. It's like studying for the ACT all over again, but with higher stakes.

Executive time! My personal favorite! Like kings of old, our president wields his smartphone scepter from the comfort of his comforter. Pajamas rule, which is why the day is best started in bed, propped on pillows, reading the news, guzzling Diet Coke and tweeting away. In this, the president exhibits true leadership, and I am happy to serve as an ambassador for the tradition and culture of “executive time.” I now start most days in 600-thread-count luxury, reading the news, scrolling through my social feeds and managing email from bed. I'll know I'm truly honoring this example of sacrificial leadership when I don't have to get dressed until noon.

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