

Creature From the Green Lagoon

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Credit...Cliff Owen/Associated Press

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A historian once told me that the presidency would distill Donald Trump to his essence.

That essence, it turns out, is trillions of microscopic organisms that suck up all the oxygen and endanger life around them.

That essence is slimy, stinky and unrelenting, as reflected in the mass of algae that infests the Reflecting Pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial. The president had pledged an “American flag blue” sheen, but the algae created green streaks that mar the \$14 million makeover of the water mirror.

The algae is a perfect metaphor to reflect on our unreflective president and his impulsive and solipsistic style of governing.

“It looks like a Rothko,” said Amanda Aldous, a 36-year-old teacher who was gazing at the Reflecting Pool Wednesday, leading suburban Seattle middle schoolers on a tour. “I think any biologist could have said this was going to happen.”

This is the hallowed site where Marian Anderson serenaded a throng after getting banished from Constitution Hall for her race, and where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech to an even bigger crowd around the 2,028-foot pool.

National Park Service workers in waders were sucking up the dead algae strewn along the bottom on Wednesday. A cooler of Popsicles helped them withstand the hot, humid weather in which the algae thrives.

On Thursday, the Interior Department was [claiming](#) to have beat back the toxic blooms — while doing a drive-by trashing of Barack Obama to please the boss.

“The advanced nanobubbler technology very effectively killed the algae that has plagued every Lincoln Reflecting Pool reopening — most infamously Obama’s reopening — since 1922,” Interior posted on X. “The Reflecting Pool water is crystal clear, and our National Park Service team is now vacuuming up the dead algae resting on the bottom of some parts of the Reflecting Pool — just like the destroyed Iranian Navy resting on the bottom of the Persian Gulf.”

Reports of Trump victories, with the knotty issues of Iran and the Reflecting Pool, are premature. Iran is gloating about Trump’s bad deal. Senate Republicans who normally don’t have the temerity to challenge Trump are deriding it. And the hydrogen peroxide that park workers used to kill the algae is [peeling](#) off the “American flag blue” paint that Trump just had directed be applied to the bottom of the pool.

To give Trump his due, the capital needed freshening up in many spots and he’s the first president in a while to restore beautiful statues and fountains that had fallen into disrepair.

When she was a young woman working for a bond company in the ’30s, my mother would stop at Meridian Hill Park in Columbia Heights on her way home from work. But the gorgeous Italian Renaissance park she loved later grew parched and shabby. Over the past seven years, there was no water in the cascading fountain — the longest such fountain in North America — or in the placid pool beneath it.

Video

CreditCredit...Andrew Trunsky/The New York Times

Channeling his triumphant rebuilding of Wollman skating rink in Central Park, Trump cleaned up Meridian Hill Park and turned on the faucets, as he did with Union Station’s statue and majestic fountain.

But for each laudable effort, there’s a litany of loathsome ones, like his plans for the hulking ballroom, the egotistical Arc de Trump, the cheesy Mar-a-Lago patio where Jackie’s Rose Garden used to be and the desecration — now halted by a federal judge — of The John F.

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. (This past week, a striped wrap was still covering the center's facade, where workers had removed Trump's name. All you could see was "The John" on one side and "forming" on the other.)

Trump wants to tear up Hains Point, where generations of D.C. kids biked and played miniature golf, for an exclusive golf course.

Even when Trump starts with a glimmer of truth — that many iconic spots in D.C. had been allowed to shamefully deteriorate — he goes overboard in such a Trumpian way that he often ends up making things worse.

He orders up bulldozers in the middle of the night, arrogantly refusing to get input from planning experts or Congress in this most meticulously and symbolically arranged federal city.

His habit of rushing in unilaterally, refusing to consult anyone except sycophants, insisting the results are amazing even when we can see that they're not, also led to the debacle of Elon Musk and DOGE and the humiliation in Iran.

He imposes his rococo, Brobdingnagian taste on our fabled buildings, crashing around ruining the classical style and perfect proportions of a city design inspired by Paris. Trump engages in cronyism on contracts and profligacy and, for all his gushing about THE BEST, he allows inefficacy to flourish.

The president as a maniacal urban planner is a white-knuckle ride, with Washington — and Washingtonians — just holding on for dear life.

When those he hasn't consulted complain about the misguided schemes, he lambastes and gaslights them on Truth Social, insisting that everything will be AMAZING. As the rival developer Leona Helmsley once said of Trump, "I wouldn't believe him if his tongue was notarized."

The Babylon Bee posted a [satirical video](#) suggesting that if a female president was mercurial — launching foreign wars, trade wars and petty feuds — and focusing on gewgaws and shoes, she'd be endlessly belittled.

A lot of Americans miss the days when we built grand things. So it's appealing on its face that this crazy president can squash the bureaucracy and get it done. But as usual with Trump, you eventually have to accept that he's incompetent and corrupt and tacky, and just an all-around mess.