We should never underestimate the rhetorical power of politicians to alter our expectations—expectations that then can cause them to be evaluated more positively in the future. President Donald Trump is a master and beneficiary of this communication tactic. His past speeches and tweets set such a low standard of conduct that the media falls into his trap, feeling compelled to declare he sounds "presidential" on those rare occasions when he doesn’t lie or say something divisive and inappropriate.

The response to Trump’s 4th of July speech at the Lincoln Memorial offers another example of this misguided tendency by the press. Saying the speech wasn't as bad as some feared is not a positive comment. Moreover, It isn't worth the media and pundits taking time to mention. It makes no sense that the President is praised for being normal (or sounding normal), when at best he’s minimally doing his job and what is expected rather than delivering something rhetorically remarkable.
This is a sad time for the presidency. It also is a sad time for the news media whose responses play right into Trump’s hand.

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