



Donald Trump: 45th US President

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Introduction

A Bet That Paid Off

On June 16, 2015, reporters, television cameras, and several hundred people gathered in the lobby of Trump Tower, a fifty-eight-story skyscraper in Manhattan. A podium on a stage held a banner with the slogan “Make America Great Again!” All heads turned as sixty-nine-year-old Donald John Trump made a grand entrance, riding down a multistory escalator with his wife, Melania. Trump biographer Gwenda Blair describes the scene: “Gazing out, they seemed for a moment like a royal couple viewing subjects from the balcony of the palace.”¹ Trump flashed two thumbs up and took his place on the stage to proclaim his intention to campaign for the Republican nomination for president.

Unlike the other politicians hoping to be elected president in November 2016, Trump was a billionaire and international celebrity who had been in the public eye for decades. Trump was known as a negotiator, salesman, television personality, and builder of glittering skyscrapers. He was involved in high-end real estate transactions, casinos, golf courses, beauty pageants, and the reality show *The Apprentice*. Trump’s name was spelled out in shiny gold letters on luxury skyscrapers, golf courses, resorts, and other properties throughout the world.

Negative Images

Many people associated the Trump name with success, wealth, and fame. But most pundits and political analysts who heard Trump’s presidential announcement speech did not believe he would ever be elected

president. Trump did not possess the smooth personality and political skills of a typical presidential candidate. He was notorious for giving speeches that wandered from topic to topic. He made outrageous statements on Twitter and supported shadowy conspiracy theories, including one that claimed that President Barack Obama was born in Kenya. Moreover, there was a widespread belief that presidential candidates needed to present an optimistic view of the United States and provide a positive vision of the future. In contrast, Trump focused on negative images. “Our country is in serious trouble,” he said in his presidential campaign announcement speech. “We don’t have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don’t have them.” In that same speech Trump went on to say that the Mexican people were laughing at American stupidity: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. . . . They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” He went on to say that “the American dream is dead” and that only he could restore it.²

Trump’s speech set off a media firestorm. Democrats and Republicans appeared on cable television news shows and social media websites to condemn Trump’s biased statements. Respected political analysts pointed out that Trump was not popular enough to win the White House; a Gallup poll taken after the speech showed that only 31 percent of potential voters had a favorable view of Trump. No candidate had ever won a national race with such a low approval rating. As journalist Chris Cillizza wrote, “You cannot and do not win anything when your numbers look like Trump’s. I can’t say it any more clearly than that.”³

“Our country is in serious trouble. We don’t have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don’t have them.”²

—Donald Trump

Defying the Odds

But after the presidential primary season began in February 2016, Trump accomplished something that almost no one thought was possible. He

Donald Trump announces that he is seeking the Republican nomination for president. His slogan, "Make America Great Again!" appears on a podium banner.



beat sixteen contenders in the Republican presidential primaries and caucuses to win the nomination. And on November 8, 2016, he again defied the odds (and the polls and pundits) by winning enough electoral votes to defeat Hillary Clinton, the Democratic nominee.

Millions of people worldwide were stunned by Trump's victory. He had broken all the traditional rules of a political campaign for president: he had never run for office or served in the military. He painted life in the United States in apocalyptic terms, insulted and demeaned his rivals, and threatened to sue journalists and other critics. During the campaign Trump was accused of inciting hostility against women, immigrants, Muslims, African Americans, Jews, and even military veterans. According to various fact-checking websites, Trump's speeches and public statements often fell short of the truth. (In December 2016, for instance, the nonpartisan fact-checking website PolitiFact said that 78 percent of Trump's statements during the campaign were false or mostly false. For Clinton, that number was 18 percent.) But Trump

understood that his outrageous comments—and his late-night Twitter storms—attracted nonstop attention from the press. The endless free publicity in the media helped energize his followers.

Although some of Trump's supporters did not agree with his more shocking statements, they appreciated his economic message. Trump spoke out against Wall Street brokers, bankers, and corporations; he said they had abandoned American workers by taking their operations overseas. He promised to bring back millions of lost jobs. He criticized the elite of both political parties, which broadened his appeal to white working-class voters who felt that they had been left behind economically.

Trump's campaign rallies were more like rock concerts than political gatherings. Ecstatic crowds donned matching T-shirts and baseball caps. They cheered wildly as the candidate hurled insults before promising them a better, brighter future. As literary critic Viet Thanh Nguyen puts it, "For all of [Trump's] faults, and there are many, he made a daring bet that paid off. He told a story that half of Americans wanted to hear."⁴ And for that he was rewarded with arguably the most influential job in the world. On January 20, 2017, Donald Trump became the forty-fifth president of the United States.

"For all of [Trump's] faults . . . he made a daring bet that paid off. He told a story that half of Americans wanted to hear."⁴

—Viet Thanh Nguyen, literary critic

two older casinos. And Trump was not just buying casinos. In 1988 he acquired the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan for nearly \$500 million. The following year he bought the Eastern Airlines Shuttle for \$380 million and renamed it the Trump Shuttle. Trump envisioned his airline as a luxury service; he spent \$1 million remodeling every jet, installing gold-plated bathroom fixtures and mahogany paneling. However, commuters did not want fancy jets for short shuttle flights—they wanted inexpensive and reliable flights. The airline never made a profit.

By the 1990s the Atlantic City casinos were in bad financial shape. Trump was worried that if a few high-stakes gamblers won large bets, his casinos would not be able to afford the payouts. And Trump's worsening financial situation was not a secret. Major newspapers across the country reported that Trump had accumulated \$3.4 billion in debt and could not make payments on the loans. In 1991 the Taj Mahal was forced into business bankruptcy. The following year Trump was in bankruptcy court two more times, for the Plaza and the Castle. The bankruptcies were filed under a provision

Donald Trump announces his intention to buy the Eastern Airlines Shuttle, which he renamed Trump Shuttle. His planned luxury airline fell short of making a profit.



Trump: The Art of the Deal

Donald Trump's book, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, is mostly about his business philosophy. It includes these and other maxims: "Think big." "Maximize your options." "Deliver the goods." It also explains his penchant for sensationalism and controversy. "People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular."

But the book reveals more about Trump than his views about business. As Jim Geraghty of the *National Review* writes, it presents a "fascinating time capsule, a long look at a 40-year-old mogul on his way to becoming the country's most famous businessman." It presents readers with a side of the man many people today might not recognize. "The Trump that emerges," Geraghty continues, "is a much softer, warmer, and probably happier figure than the man dominating the airwaves today. He comes across as a garrulous uncle, reverent to his father and mother, still wildly enamored with his wife Ivana, and taking delight in his growing children. He writes about Ivana with fondness, heaping praise on her skill at managing the Trump Castle casino. He chuckles that he never expected to spend parts of his mornings examining kindergarten classrooms at private schools for Ivanka and Eric."

Quoted in Richard Feloni, "Donald Trump's Core Business Philosophy from His Bestselling 1987 Book 'The Art of the Deal'," *Business Insider*, June 16, 2015.

Jim Geraghty, "In *The Art of the Deal*, Trump Shows His Soft Side," *National Review*, September 24, 2015. www.nationalreview.com.

called Chapter 11, which allows troubled companies to stay in business while reorganizing their business practices and reducing debt. A bankruptcy judge removed Trump from his management position, and he was forced to surrender half his stake in the casinos. Trump also had to sell the Trump Shuttle and his \$29 million, 282-foot (86 m) yacht, the *Trump Princess*.

Keeping His Personal Wealth Intact

Trump would declare bankruptcy on three more occasions on his hotel and casino holdings before 2010. When his six bankruptcies became an issue in the 2016 presidential debate with Hillary Clinton, Trump stated, "I have used the laws of this country . . . the [bankruptcy] chapter



Source Notes

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3. Chris Cillizza, “Why No One Should Take Donald Trump Seriously, in One Very Simple Chart,” *Washington Post*, June 17, 2015. www.washingtonpost.com.
4. Viet Thanh Nguyen, “Listen to Radicals, Artists,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 2016, p. F10.

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5. Quoted in Politico staff, “Full Text: Donald Trump 2016 RNC Draft Speech Transcript,” Politico, July 21, 2016. www.politico.com.
6. Jason Horowitz, “Fred Trump Taught His Son the Essentials of Showboating Self-Promotion,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2016. www.nytimes.com.
7. Quoted in Paul Schwartzman and Michael E. Miller, “Confident. Incurable. Bully: Little Donny Was a Lot Like Candidate Donald Trump,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 2016. www.washingtonpost.com.
8. Donald Trump and Tony Schwartz, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1987, pp. 71–72.
9. Trump and Schwartz, *Trump*, pp. 72–73.
10. Trump and Schwartz, *Trump*, p. 81.
11. Trump and Schwartz, *Trump*, p. 83.
12. Quoted in Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher, *Trump Revealed: An American Journey of Ambition, Ego, Money, and Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016, p. 55.



Timeline

Important Events in the Life of Donald Trump

1946

Donald John Trump is born on June 14 in New York City.

1970

Trump begins working with his father developing real estate in Queens and Brooklyn.

1977

Donald Trump marries Ivana Zelnicekova.

1980

Trump's first New York City development, the Grand Hyatt Hotel, opens.

1983

Trump Tower opens on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

1984

Trump opens Harrah's at Trump Plaza in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

1987

Trump's best-selling book, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, is published.



For Further Research

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Jennifer Fandel, *Democracy*. Mankato, MN: Creative Paperbacks, 2017.

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