

Love Him or Hate Him, Trump Has Survived Years in the Media Spotlight – Both Flattering and Dim

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Donald Trump was a media sensation. Flamboyant, witty and fabulously wealthy, he was one of the most successful real estate moguls in New York and the nation—and the media couldn't get enough. Magazines, newspapers, radio and TV—he was everywhere. He was a multimillionaire, married with one child, and a highly sought-after public figure in 1980 when he was invited to NBC's Manhattan studios for a sit-down interview with the network's celebrity anchor Tom Brokaw on the *Today* show.

"Mr. Trump, what's left in your life?" Brokaw asked. "You're 33 years old, you're worth all this money. You say you didn't say that you want to be worth a billion dollars."

Trump had been described as brash and egotistical. He had grown up in the borough of Queens, then earned an Ivy League degree from the Wharton School and followed his millionaire father into business. He had reason to be vain, and he clearly relished his success. He wasn't shy about his wealth and surely believed he would soon be a billionaire. But he was always polite in interviews and, as pointed out by *The Atlantic*, even somewhat humble.

"No, I really don't," he answered Brokaw. "I just want to keep busy and keep active and be interested in what I do. And that's all there is to life as far as I'm concerned."

The Young Real Estate Developer Becomes a National

Celebrity

Little by little, and one sound bite after another, the handsome young real estate developer from New York City was becoming a national celebrity and household name. Completing the repairs on Central Park's Wollman ice-skating rink in record time and \$750,000 under budget, after the original contractor had run over budget and out of time, dramatically elevated his celebrity status with New Yorkers.

I remember reading how he humiliated the city of New York by completing the Wollman ice-skating rink when they couldn't. But overall, I wasn't impressed by him because of his playboy reputation, and I had no interest in following his career. I never would have dreamed that 30 years later, he'd be elected the 45th president of the United States.

How could someone with so much success, charm and public acclaim suddenly become the most controversial person on the planet?

Trump's fortunes rose and fell repeatedly throughout the 1990s, but by 2004, he was on the move, with three nationally televised beauty pageants, a best-selling book, and a string of casinos. And, of course, his own reality TV show, *The Apprentice*, which was just beginning its stunning 15-season run.

His signature property, Trump Tower, completed in 1983 on Fifth Avenue in the heart of midtown Manhattan, was the world headquarters of the growing Trump empire. A feature by James Traub in the *New York Times Magazine* said, "Trump probably receives more requests for interviews than any other private citizen in New York."

"The rules that govern others just don't apply to Trump," Traub asserted. "With him, it's celebrity that breeds success rather than the other way around. And Trump has never been a bigger celebrity than he is now, thanks to the astounding

success of *The Apprentice*, which has been nominated for four Emmys and began its second season last week.” And to top it off, he said, *The Art of the Deal*, which was published in 1987, sold 835,000 copies in hardcover alone.”

The Trump Organization weathered its share of problems, including bankruptcies and lawsuits of various kinds, but the success of his book and the weekly television exposure were giving “The Donald” a much bigger audience.

With all his success, Trump had ascended to the Olympus of the celebrity culture, where the likes of Oprah, Martha Stewart, Ralph Lauren and hip-hop artist P. Diddy reigned. He had a TV show, his own golf courses, a magazine – *Trump World*—and his name on a collection of shirts, ties, suits and a fragrance.

But as they say, *tempus fugit* (“time flies”), and for many younger voters, all this describes a Donald Trump they’ve never known. For the mainstream media, in particular, the luster of the rising star has evaporated. The man who would become America’s 45th president has become an object of scorn. But the existential question is, “How is it possible that someone with so much success, charm and public acclaim could suddenly become the most controversial and divisive person on the planet? What changed?”

From Celebrity Darling to Conservative Pariah

I believe that Donald Trump changed. As I describe elsewhere in my new book, *Trump Aftershock*, he began watching Christian television and asking questions to Christian leaders such as Paula White Cain. In the process, his politics changed. He became opposed to abortion and embraced other conservative causes.

Is it little wonder the liberal media elite didn’t like the new conservative Trump any more than they liked those in America who, as Barack Obama famously said, cling to their “guns or religion.”

As the crowds at his presidential campaign rallies in cities and towns all over America have demonstrated, Donald Trump is still celebrated and admired by millions of regular Americans. At the same time, however, he is cursed and reviled with equal measures of fear and loathing by Hollywood, academia and the New York elites. His approval rating sat at 49 percent on Nov. 1, 2018. However, among liberals, progressives and the mainstream media, there are no words to describe the seething hatred that rises within them whenever his name is mentioned.

We can wonder how a nation can be so divided, but perhaps we have the media to thank.

This article originally appeared on The Stream. Reprinted with permission.

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