



Clinton vs Trump, Architecture of the American Elections

Let's start with the first candidate, the one that is going to win the election by all accounts. As her husband, William Jefferson, recalled at the Democratic National Convention, his purchase of a very modest brick home lured her into marriage and a life in Arkansas.

A few years later the couple invested in a development deal, Whitewater, that would have brought standard-issue condominiums to a recreational lake and some extra income, allowing them to move up. But the deal went bad (one of the "scandals" that has plagued Bill and Hillary for years) and the condos were never built. After inhabiting the White House for eight years in the nineties, the couple became quite wealthy and moved to a fine but not especially significant Dutch colonial home in Chappaqua, a suburb of New York City.

In contrast, Donald J. Trump's life has been deeply involved with building, development, speculation. Perhaps for this, architecture is almost an annoyance, something that gets in the way. Anecdotes abound about how in his impatience to stick to schedule and avoid cost overruns he authorized the destruction an art deco facade from Bonwit Teller (formerly Stewart's), the high-end department store he razed to build Trump Tower on New York City's Fifth Ave.

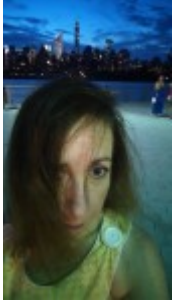
But from another point of view, isn't the support of a certain kind of building crucial to a style of architecture? One about shine—the gold leaf covering almost every possible inch of his living room suite in his city residence, for instance; and color (the pink marble of the public spaces) rather than form? Rather than a postmodern pastiche of different styles, Trumpism represents the total triumph of reflection (mirrors, chrome, glass). A sickening overdose of elements that signal wealth before anything else.

Architects who have worked for him have spoken openly about his failure to pay (especially in the case of one Andrew Tesoro featured in a Clinton Tv ad; Trump didn't want to pay the fee agreed upon in the contract, not because the work wasn't good, but "because I've already spent too much on the property.")

Like his taxes, Trump's charitable contributions, have been the subject of intense speculation. His giving often seems tied to publicity stunts or public events. His charitable foundation is under investigation by the New York Attorney General (a democrat) for questionable practices. In 2012 the foundation apparently donated \$10,000 (€ 11,000) to the American Institute of Architects Florida division. And soon afterwards, Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate was honored as the most historically significant building in the state. To be clear, this Moorish palace, built in the 1920s of Genovese stone, was only purchased by Trump in the 80s. He can take credit for it—his name is associated to it, but he had nothing to do with its design.

During the presidential campaign, he opened yet another hotel, this one in Washington, D.C., at the old Romanesque-style post office building, just down the road from the White House. In fact, he gave a press conference there, causing some reporters to speculate that he was engaging in yet another publicity stunt under the assumption that his brand would be bolstered by his run for the white house, whether or not he ultimately won. But as has been pointed out by others, the very brand that is associated with his buildings, hotels, spas, golf courses, and so on, is one that is simply out of reach of the very Americans who support his campaign. And this may be why, rather than a new building, his next project seems to be the development of a media outlet, perhaps a conservative television network bearing his name.

About Author



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Nata a New York City, è docente all'Università Cornell. Oltre a numerose pubblicazioni accademiche, tra cui i libri "Bodily Regimes: Italian advertising under fascism" (premio per il migliore libro d'Italianistica della Modern Language Association), "The Montesi Scandal: the Death of Wilma Montesi and the Birth of the Papparazzi in Fellini's Rome" e "Alchemical Mercury: a Theory of Ambivalence", ha collaborato con "Il manifesto" su argomenti culturali.

Attualmente s'interessa del cambiamento climatico da un punto di vista umanista. Il suo libro, "Fuel, A Speculative Dictionary" (2018) è in uscita in italiano con Ombre Corte (2020), mentre "Clocking Out: The Machinery of Life in 60s Italian Cinema" (2020) è in traduzione per Quodlibet

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