

**THE “TRIALS” OF TRUMP:
THE COMEBACK: SMOKE,
MIRRORS, AND THE MEDIA**

Brant Houston

University of Illinois

brant.houston@gmail.com

FIRST THE NEWS

npr.org/2024/03/25/1240619833/trump-hush-money-trial-bond-payment

Appeals court has lowered Trump's bond in civil fraud case to \$175 million

UPDATED MARCH 25, 2024 · 12:42 PM ET

HEARD ON MORNING EDITION

By Andrea Bernstein, Ximena Bustillo

 3-Minute Listen

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A New York judge on Monday set April 15 as the new start date in former President Donald Trump's hush money case.

Joe Raedle/Getty Images

Former President Trump had a mixed day in court Monday: A judge rejected

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Here's a look at Trump's properties and what Judge [Arthur Engoron](#), in his rulings, determined they are worth -- as well as what Trump has claimed about their value as recently as 2020.

Trump National Golf Club Westchester, Briarcliff Manor, New York

18-hole golf course with pool, tennis courts, and venue space

Trump's claimed value: Trump listed the value of the course between \$43 million and \$78 million, and he valued the undeveloped land between \$25M-\$105M.

Judge's finding: A professional appraisal listed the potential development as worth \$45 million in 2013, and the golf course itself was worth \$16.5 million according to a 2014 appraisal.

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Seven Springs estate, Bedford, New York

200-acre estate in Westchester County originally purchased by Trump in 1995 for \$7.5 million

Trump's claimed value: Between \$261 million and \$291 million (on 2011-2014 statements of financial condition)

Judge's finding: Between \$30 million and \$56.6 million (2015 appraisal at \$56.6 million assumed a planned development)

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Trump Tower, New York City

68-story skyscraper on Fifth Avenue with 263 residences and a commercial space, including a 10,996-square-foot, three-floor penthouse that Trump occupied as his primary residence for decades

Trump's claimed value: \$548,200,000, with the penthouse valued between \$80 million and \$327 million (in 2011-2021 statements)

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Judge's finding: Between \$80 million and \$120 million for the penthouse; ruled that Trump used an incorrect capitalization rate to determine the value of the overall property



Marquee at the main entrance to the Trump Tower building in New York City, Oct. 17, 2023.

Erik McGregor/LightRocket via Getty Images

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Niketown, New York City

65,000-square-foot retail space on 57th Street that formerly housed Nike and Tiffany's

Trump's claimed value: \$252,800,000

Judge's finding: Trump used an incorrect capitalization rate to determine the value of the property.

FIRST THE NEWS

Judge's finding: Trump used an incorrect capitalization rate to determine the value of the property.

40 Wall Street, New York City

72-story downtown Manhattan skyscraper

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Trump's claimed value: \$663,600,000 (in 2020, Trump disclosed \$139,000,000 in loans related to the property)

Judge's finding: \$540 million based on 2015 professional appraisal

Mar-a-Lago, Palm Beach, Florida

*Palm Beach social club with ballrooms, pools, spas, tennis courts, and beach access;
Trump currently uses the property as his private residence*

Trump's claimed value: Between \$426 million and \$612 million

Judge's finding: Between \$18 million and \$27.6 million

FIRST THE NEWS

Trump National Doral, Miami

Property includes four championship golf courses, a spa, and a 643-room resort

Trump's claimed value: Trump valued the property between \$297 million and \$345 million in 2020 and 2021.

Judge's finding: A 2020 appraisal found the property had a market value of \$78 million.

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- Trump International Golf Club in Aberdeen, Scotland
- Trump Turnberry in South Ayrshire, Scotland
- Trump International Golf Links in Doonbeg, Ireland

Trump's claimed value: \$1,880,700,000 including Mar-a-Lago (in 2020, Trump disclosed \$140,000,000 in loans related to his golf club facilities)

Judge's finding: Trump fraudulently included a 15%-30% brand premium for seven clubs, misrepresented some membership dues, and overvalued potential developments at his Briarcliff and Los Angeles courses.

Partnerships and Joint Ventures

Trump has a partnership with Vornado Realty Trust related to 1290 Avenue of the Americas in New York City and 555 California Street in San Francisco

Trump's claimed value: \$883,300,000

Judge's finding: Trump misstated his control of the property; he does not have the ability to use or withdraw funds held by the partnership.

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The New York Times

[Trump Hush-Money Case](#) > | [Trial Date Is Set](#) | [Highlights From the Hearing](#) | [The Indictment](#) | [Who Is Alvin Bragg?](#) | [Trump Case Track](#)

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Trump Criminal Trial Is Set for April 15 as His Attempt at Delay Fails


Donald Trump is poised to become the first ex-president to go on trial on criminal charges, in a case related to hush money paid to a porn star.

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▶️  ACURA ZDX

Trump just got a huge 62% discount on his bond. That's extremely rare, legal experts say.

[Laura Italiano](#), [Jacob Shamsian](#), and [Geoff Weiss](#) Mar 25, 2024, 3:56 PM CDT [Share](#) [Save](#)



Former president Donald Trump speaks to the media after a pre-trial hearing at Criminal Court on March 25, 2024 in New York City. Justin Lane-Pool/Getty Images

FIRST THE NEWS

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Trump Media stock to begin public trading on Tuesday

A trading frenzy Monday in shares of Digital World Acquisition, the company Trump Media merged with, saw the stock rise 35 percent



By [Drew Harwell](#)

March 25, 2024 at 6:04 p.m. EDT



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SIEMENS Technology to transform the

POLITICS

Trump could sell billions in Truth Social stock early if a board consisting of his son and former colleagues agrees

[Madison Hall](#) Mar 22, 2024, 12:01 PM CDT [Share](#) [Save](#)



Trump easily won the New Hampshire in 2016. AP Photo/David Goldman

- Trump's net worth just jumped billions after a Truth Social merger was approved on Friday.

NEWS IN THE NEWS


washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/03/25/trump-truth-social-stock-2024/

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Opinion | Trump's new stock deal is just another pig in a poke

By Adam Lashinsky
Contributing columnist

March 25, 2024 at 9:13 a.m. EDT



A photo illustration of former U.S. president Donald Trump's Truth Social account. (Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images)

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


The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

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I don't give investment advice. But I assure you that a company with \$3.4 million in revenue and \$49 million in losses over the past nine months is not worth \$5 billion. Buy into shares of any company with those numbers and you are certain to be taken for a sucker.

That Donald Trump will be the one doing the bamboozling means that investors in his public media company might as well be making a political donation to his campaign or contributing to a Trump legal defense fund instead. This scheme is unfolding in the plain light of day, and securities regulators are powerless to do anything about it.

The company in question until Monday was known as Digital World Acquisition, a SPAC, or special-purpose acquisition company, formed three years ago. It raised nearly \$300 million in a 2021 initial public offering with the intention of buying another company. The company Digital World decided to buy is a now-two-year-old, 36-employee start-up called Trump Media & Technology Group, whose "first" product, according to securities filings, is Truth Social, Trump's answer to Twitter.

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The reason Digital World's shares are now worth north of \$5 billion is that, after years of holdups, it finally has received permission from the Securities and Exchange Commission and approval from shareholders to complete its purchase of Trump Media. Investors, and presumably some Trump fans excited to be owning a piece of a company with his name on it, bid up shares of Digital World last week. Now that the two have merged, Digital World has become Trump Media, stock-market valuation and all.

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In Trump Media's own words, through its filings, it "aspires to build a media and technology powerhouse to rival the liberal media consortium and promote free expression." The key word there is "aspiring." So far, Truth Social hasn't come close. To date, its sales, as noted, have been few, and it has had just under 9 million "sign-ups," a figure as minuscule as it is meaningless. The company itself doesn't seem impressed. It notes that "adhering to traditional key performance indicators, such as signups, average revenue per user, ad impressions and pricing ... could potentially divert its focus from strategic evaluation with respect to the progress and growth of its business."

Translation of that financial word salad: Truth Social hasn't amounted to much so far; pay no attention to our lack of specifics.

Trump, of course, has a long and checkered business track record. The SEC's disclosure rules require Trump Media to detail his flops, with the admonition that this investment could become one, too. The list is long, and the language is damning. "The Trump Taj Mahal, which was built and owned by President Trump, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1991. The Trump Plaza, the Trump Castle, and the Plaza Hotel, all owned by President Trump at the time, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1992." It continues by name-checking Trump's other business failures: Trump

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Another risk that investors in Trump Media will face is its namesake dumping shares to pay his legal bills. Much was made last week of Trump's potential windfall from the deal. Because he owns about 58 percent of the company — worth more than \$3 billion at last week's stock price — Trump in theory could sell shares to help fund his just-reduced \$175 million bond he owes the state of New York after his civil fraud judgment there. He would need the management or board of Trump Media to wave a customary six-month lockup on his shares, which easily could happen since he will control both. But selling large numbers of shares is likely to tank the stock. And despite speculation to the contrary, it stretches credulity to assume he'd be able to borrow by using Trump Media's flimsy shares as collateral.

Investors who persist in backing Trump cannot say they weren't warned.

FIRST THE NEWS

Fani Willis: 'Train is coming' for Trump despite efforts to derail Georgia case

Fulton county district attorney says she doesn't feel like 'we have been slowed down' by Trump's efforts to disqualify her



📹 Fulton county district attorney Fani Willis attends a hearing on the Georgia election interference case, March 1, 2024, in Atlanta. Photograph: Alex Slitz/Reuters

The Georgia prosecutor overseeing **Donald Trump's** election interference case in that state promised on Saturday that “the train is coming” for him despite defense efforts to derail her office’s pursuit of charges against the former president and nearly two dozen co-defendants.

Fulton county district attorney **Fani Willis's** remarks came after a court challenge centering on a romantic relationship that she had with a special prosecutor whom she appointed to the case, Nathan Wade. After the relationship was exposed, Wade stepped down from the prosecution to defuse any appearances of a potential conflict of interest and so Willis could stay on the case.

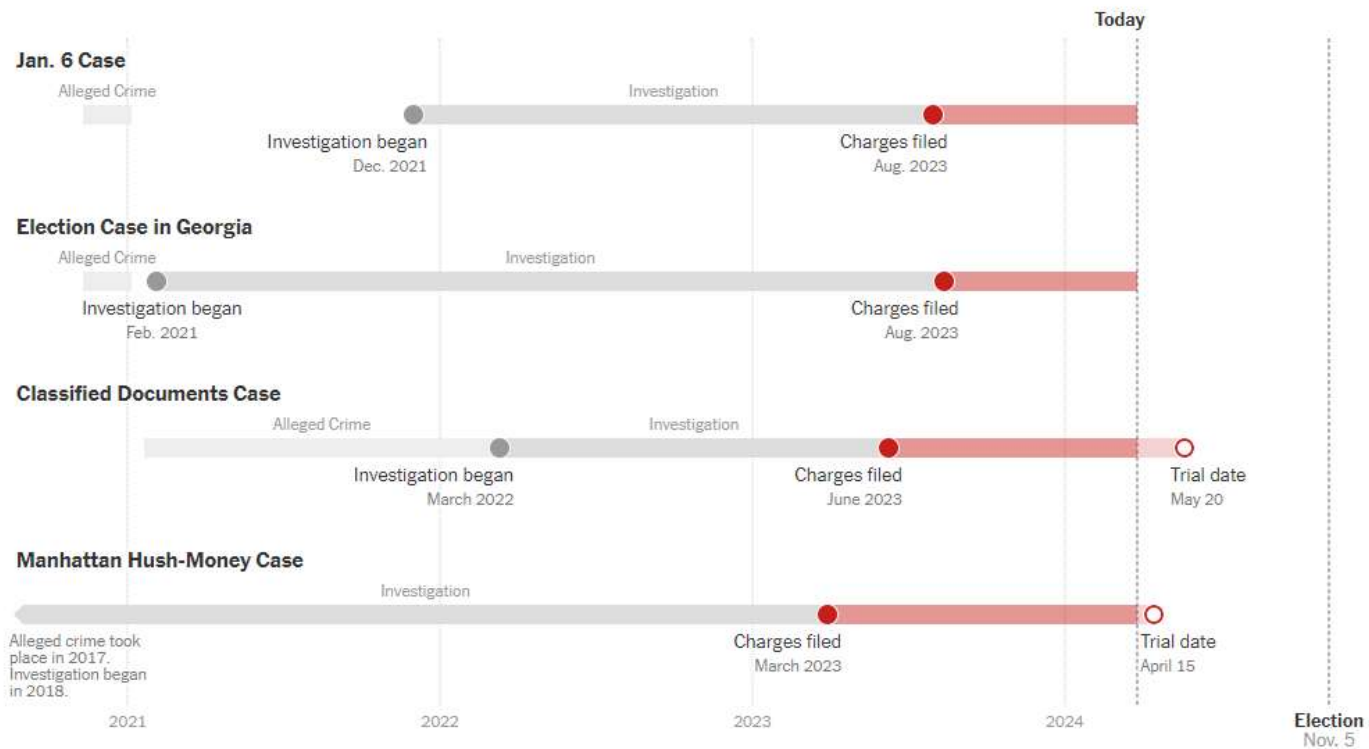
“I don’t feel like we have been slowed down at all” by Trump’s efforts to use

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The New York Times

What Comes Next?

Mr. Trump has been indicted in four inquiries, with the cases expected to unfold as he runs for president again.



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The Washington Post
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NATIONAL SECURITY Foreign Policy Intelligence Justice Military

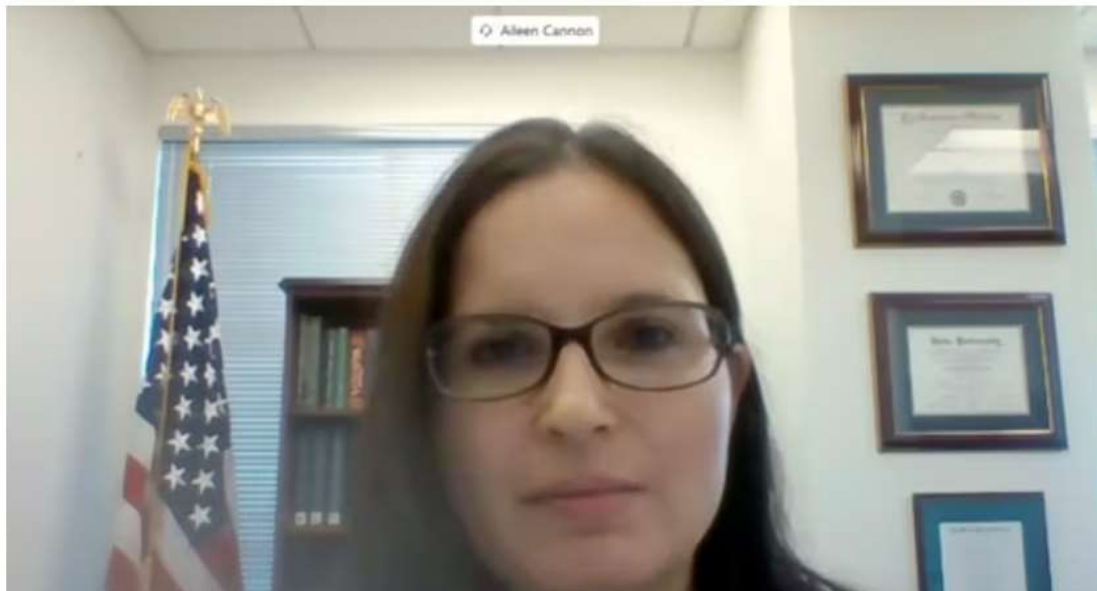
THE TRUMP CASES

‘Very, very troubling’: Judges, lawyers flummoxed by Judge Cannon

The jurist overseeing Donald Trump’s classified documents case in Florida has raised eyebrows and alarms with her latest order

By [Devlin Barrett](#) and [Perry Stein](#)


March 20, 2024 at 2:38 p.m. EDT




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Lawyers and former judges said they are baffled by an order issued this week by the federal judge overseeing Donald Trump’s pending trial on charges that he mishandled classified documents — and believe her instructions suggest the case will not go to trial anytime soon.

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“In my 30 years as a trial judge, I have never seen an order like this,” said Jeremy Fogel, who served on the federal bench in California and now runs the Berkeley Judicial Institute.

On Monday evening, U.S. District Judge Aileen M. Cannon ordered the defense lawyers and the prosecutors in the case to file submissions outlining proposed jury instructions based on two scenarios, each of which badly misstates the law and facts of the case, according to legal experts.

She has given the sides two weeks to craft jury instructions around competing interpretations of the Presidential Records Act, often referred to as the PRA. While the law says presidential records belong to the public and are to be turned over to the National Archives and Records Administration at the end of a presidency, Trump’s lawyers

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Cannon's order suggests that she thinks the PRA is critical to the case — and that parts of the law are open to interpretation.

Jason R. Baron, former director of litigation at the National Archives and Records Administration, said that's just not true. He said Cannon seems to continually conflate the PRA with the Espionage Act, which makes unauthorized sharing or handling of national defense information a crime. Baron said the PRA does not influence whether someone can be prosecuted under the Espionage Act.

“There is no ambiguity that the classified documents at issue in this case are presidential records,” Baron said. “He wasn't indicted because he took newspaper clippings. He was indicted because he took documents that were marked as classified.”

Baron said the judge, who has not previously overseen a major national security trial, seems to be embracing a fantastical view of the law.

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Veteran trial lawyers say it is not unusual for a judge to make it hard for one side to try their case — and jurists are often, but not always, harder on defense lawyers than on prosecutors.

But in the Trump documents case, lawyers said, Smith may simply have to weather whatever legal storms Cannon creates, and be patient and confident that the evidence his team has amassed will ultimately convince a jury. That is what happened when a previous special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III, went to trial against former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

In that trial, U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis III frequently made comments critical of the special counsel team and its handling of the case, questioning its judgment and limiting what evidence it could show the jury. Prosecutors pushed on, and Manafort was eventually convicted.

TRUMP SUCCESSES BASED ON EARLY REAL ESTATE DEALS

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Donald Trump's 16 Biggest Business Failures and Successes

6 MINUTE READ



THE REAL ESTATE DEALS

Successful

Grand Hyatt Hotel

Trump bought the former Commodore Hotel, which had fallen into relative disrepair, from Penn Central Railroad in 1974 and after six years of construction, the Grand Hyatt Hotel debuted. Smack dab in the heart of New York City, with the image of Grand Central reflected off its glass façade, the 34-story hotel is still booming business today.

Trump Tower

Trump broke ground on his now-famous 48-story Trump Tower in 1980. The luxury high-rise opened in 1983 and, with upscale restaurants and stores located in the mostly residential building, is still highly sought after real estate.

THE REAL ESTATE DEALS

Wollman Rink

Ad closed by Google

Trump renovated **Wollman Rink** in 1986 after contacting Mayor Ed Koch and offering to complete the renovation for \$3 million. He finished the project on time and \$750,000 under budget. Wollman Rink remains a Central Park fixture with more than 5 million annual visitors.

40 Wall Street

Trump purchased the building in 1995 for \$1 million and renovated it for \$35 million. Today, **40 Wall Street**, one of the tallest office buildings in downtown New York, is worth over \$500 million.

Trump Place

After years of negotiations, Trump finally broke ground on Trump Place, the gargantuan housing development along the Hudson River. The development includes 25 acres of open space and 5,700 apartments housed in 18 residential buildings.

The Apprentice

The Apprentice premiered on NBC in 2004 to great ratings. Trump served as not only the host but also the executive producer, raking in \$1 million per episode. The show was successful enough that it inspired a spinoff, *The Celebrity Apprentice*.

CHICAGO HOTEL

Trump International Tower Chicago

Trump bought the former Chicago Sun-Times headquarters in 2005 for \$73 million and converted it into the second tallest building in Chicago. It houses a hotel, condos, restaurants and shops, and was named Travel+Leisure's best large city hotel in North America in 2010.

SURVIVOR PRODUCER THROWS TRUMP A LIFELINE

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PROFILES

HOW MARK BURNETT RESURRECTED DONALD TRUMP AS AN ICON OF AMERICAN SUCCESS

With "The Apprentice," the TV producer mythologized Trump—then a floundering D-lister—as the ultimate titan, paving his way to the Presidency.

By Patrick Radden Keefe
December 27, 2018



MEETING AT THE RINK

He needed someone to play the role of heavyweight tycoon. Burnett, who tends to narrate stories from his own life in the bravura language of a Hollywood pitch, once said of the show, “It’s got to have a hook to it, right? They’ve got to be working for someone big and special and important. Cut to: I’ve rented this skating rink.”

In 2002, Burnett rented Wollman Rink, in Central Park, for a live broadcast of the Season 4 finale of “Survivor.” The property was controlled by Donald Trump, who had obtained the lease to operate the rink in 1986, and had plastered his name on it. Before the segment started, Burnett addressed fifteen hundred spectators who had been corralled for the occasion, and noticed Trump sitting with Melania Knauss, then his girlfriend, in the front row. Burnett prides himself on his ability to “read the room”: to size up the personalities in his audience, suss out what they want, and then give it to them.

“I need to show respect to Mr. Trump,” Burnett recounted, in a 2013 speech in

ART OF THE DEAL WAS APPRENTICE

Tony Schwartz, who wrote “The Art of the Deal,” which falsely presented Trump as its primary author, told me that he feels some responsibility for facilitating Trump’s imposture. But, he said, “Mark Burnett’s influence was vastly greater,” adding, “‘The Apprentice’ was the single biggest factor in putting Trump in the national spotlight.” Schwartz has publicly condemned Trump, describing him as “the monster I helped to create.” Burnett, by contrast, has refused to speak publicly about his relationship with the President or about his curious, but decisive, role in American history.

MAXIMIZE PROFITS

“The Apprentice” portrayed Trump not as a skeezy hustler who huddles with local mobsters but as a plutocrat with impeccable business instincts and unparalleled wealth—a titan who always seemed to be climbing out of helicopters or into limousines. “Most of us knew he was a fake,” Braun told me. “He had just gone through I don’t know how many bankruptcies. But we made him out to be the most important person in the world. It was like making the court jester the king.” Bill Pruitt, another producer, recalled, “We walked through the offices and saw chipped furniture. We saw a crumbling empire at every turn. Our job was to make it seem otherwise.”

Trump maximized his profits from the start. When producers were searching for office space in which to stage the show, he vetoed every suggestion, then mentioned that he had an empty floor available in Trump Tower, which he could lease at a reasonable price. (After becoming President, he offered a similar arrangement to the Secret Service.) When the production staff tried to furnish the space, they found that local vendors, stiffed by Trump in the past, refused to do business with them.

RATINGS GALORE

NBC executives were so enamored of their new star that they instructed Burnett and his producers to give Trump more screen time. This is when Trump's obsession with television ratings took hold. "I didn't know what demographics *was* four weeks ago," he told Larry King. "All of a sudden, I heard we were No. 3 in demographics. Last night, we were No. 1 in demographics. And that's the important rating." The ratings kept rising, and the first season's finale was the No. 1 show of the week. For Burnett, Trump's rehabilitation was a satisfying confirmation of a populist aesthetic. "I like it when critics slam a movie and it does massive box office," he once said. "I love it." Whereas others had seen in Trump only a tattered celebrity of the eighties, Burnett had glimpsed a feral charisma.

NEWS IN THE NEWS

POLITICS OCTOBER 14, 2016

How Trump Went Bust and Got Rich Using Other People's Money: A Timeline

He took on unsustainable debts, dumped them on others, and borrowed lots of family money along the way.



MAX J. ROSENTHAL

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Evan Vucci/AP

CHIPPING AWAY AT DEBT

1996: Trump Hotels buys the Taj and the Trump Castle from...Trump

Trump Hotels' brief success came to a screeching halt when Trump used the company to buy his two other, heavily indebted Atlantic City casinos. In the case of the Trump Castle, Trump Hotels paid \$100 million more than market value for the casino. That gave Trump two huge financial lifts. First, he pocketed an \$880,000 personal fee for making the transaction. Second, and much more important, the \$1.7 billion debt owed on the casinos suddenly no longer belonged to him, but to Trump Hotels. There may have even been a third benefit: David Cay Johnston, an investigative reporter who has covered Trump for decades, wrote for the *Daily Beast* earlier this month that Trump had likely earned a personal tax break in 1995 by forgoing future depreciation benefits on his casinos. "That meant Trump got money for selling his casino hotels, while the investors got real estate with greatly diminished tax benefits," he wrote.

MONEY OUT OF FAILURE

EPILOGUE: Trump 2.0

Trump has since rebuilt his career and image, largely through risk-free licensing deals and the publicity boom from starring on *The Apprentice*. He put the Trump name on buildings built around the world by other companies and was frequently accused of misleading buyers about his role in the projects. He's also slapped his name onto vodka, steaks, dietary supplements, and bottled water produced by other people—and, of course, Trump University, which made him the subject of ongoing fraud lawsuits. Trump has made money on many of these deals without having to assume any responsibility for the businesses, even when they fail.

THE APPRENTICE = \$427 MILLION



STRONGER THAN EVER

Mr. Trump with Mark Burnett, the creator of the television show “The Apprentice”
Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Tax records show that “The Apprentice” rescued Donald J. Trump, bringing him new sources of cash and a myth that would propel him to the White House.



By Mike McIntire, Russ Buettner and Susanne Craig

Sept. 28, 2020



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2.1K

From the back seat of a stretch limousine heading to meet the first contestants for his new TV show “The Apprentice,” Donald J. Trump bragged that he was a billionaire who had overcome financial hardship.

“I used my brain, I used my negotiating skills and I worked it all out,” he told viewers. “Now, my company is bigger than it ever was and stronger than it ever was.”

It was all a hoax.

FAME TO FORTUNE

Twelve years later, that image of the self-made, self-saved mogul, beamed into the national consciousness, would help fuel Mr. Trump's improbable election to the White House.

But while the story of “The Apprentice” is by now well known, the president's tax returns reveal another grand twist that has never been truly told — how the popularity of that fictional alter ego rescued him, providing a financial lifeline to reinvent himself yet again. And then how, in an echo of the boom-and-bust cycle that has defined his business career, he led himself toward the financial shoals he must navigate today.

Mr. Trump's genius, it turned out, wasn't running a company. It was making himself famous — Trump-scale famous — and monetizing that fame.

SIDE DEALS MADE \$230 MILLION

By analyzing the tax records, The New York Times was able to place a value on Mr. Trump's celebrity. While the returns show that he earned some \$197 million directly from "The Apprentice" over 16 years — roughly in line with what [he has claimed](#) — they also reveal that an additional \$230 million flowed from the fame associated with it.



Tax records show that Donald Trump earned \$197 million directly from "The Apprentice," and \$230 million from licensing and endorsement deals that followed. Bill Tompkins/Getty Images

ADMAN, INTERNATIONAL DEALS

The show's big ratings meant that everyone wanted a piece of the Trump brand, and he grabbed at the opportunity to rent it out. There was \$500,000 to pitch Double Stuf Oreos, another half-million to sell Domino's Pizza and \$850,000 to push laundry detergent.

There were seven-figure licensing deals with hotel builders, some with murky backgrounds, in former Soviet republics and other developing countries. And there were schemes that exploited misplaced trust in the TV version of Mr. Trump, who, off camera, peddled worthless get-rich-quick nostrums like "[Donald Trump Way to Wealth](#)" seminars that promised initiation into "the secrets and strategies that have made Donald Trump a billionaire."

Just as, years before, the money Mr. Trump [secretly received from his father](#) allowed him to assemble a wobbly collection of Atlantic City casinos and other disparate enterprises that then collapsed around him, the new influx of cash helped finance a buying spree that saw him snap up golf resorts, a business not known for easy profits. Indeed, the tax records show that his golf properties have been hemorrhaging millions of dollars for years.

SHOW TIME

Divorced for the second time, and coming off the failure of his Atlantic City casinos, Mr. Trump faced escalating money problems and the prospect of another trip to bankruptcy court. On his income tax returns, he reported annual net losses throughout the 1990s, some of it carried forward year to year, a tide that would swell to \$352.8 million at the end of 2002.

Few people knew this, however, because he kept up the relentless self-promotion that had served him well: a half-serious 2000 presidential campaign that lasted four months but got him on Jay Leno; a TV ad touting McDonald's new \$1 "Big N' Tasty" burger; another ghostwritten book.

But if Mr. Trump was still living off his residual fame, his biggest splashes were behind him. Something had to change. And as fate would have it, Mr. Trump got a boost from an unexpected source, one that would do much to shape his future, if not that of the country itself.

Mark Burnett, a British television producer best known for the hit series "Survivor," approached him with an idea for a different reality show, this one based in a boardroom. In Mr. Burnett's vision, a cast of wannabe entrepreneurs would come to New York and compete for the approval of the Donald, with the winner to work on a Trump project. Mr. Trump eagerly agreed to host "The Apprentice" and went on to ham it up as the billionaire kingmaker, yelling "You're fired" each week until one contestant was left.

GIVING BACK

“We walked through the offices and saw chipped furniture,” Bill Pruitt, one of the producers, [told The New Yorker](#) in 2018. “We saw a crumbling empire at every turn. Our job was to make it seem otherwise.”

Mr. Burnett wasted no time spinning the illusion of a successful and high-minded Mr. Trump, [telling The Times](#) in October 2003 that the new show was all about “Donald Trump giving back” by educating the public on how his can-do spirit had provided jobs and economic security.

“What makes the world a safe place right now?” Mr. Burnett said. “I think it’s American dollars, which come from taxes, which come because of Donald Trump.”

TRUTHFUL HYPERBOLE

With his penchant for using what he called [“truthful hyperbole”](#) to play on people’s desires, Mr. Trump had always skated close to the edge of fraud. Soon, he would be accused of crossing the line completely.

In his zeal to squeeze ever more dollars out of Mr. Burnett’s golden goose, Mr. Trump signed on to an array of questionable products and services, including some that claimed to sell insights into his business expertise. The first year of “The Apprentice” was barely over when Mr. Trump pocketed \$300,000 to speak at an event in Dayton, Ohio, where attendees paid \$2,995 to learn the secrets of instant wealth from a company that was later accused in [a lawsuit](#) of running a Ponzi scheme.

In his monologues, he made a virtue of his first round of casino failures, portraying himself as a victim whose grit and intelligence saved the day. People ate it up.

“His presence gives me reassurance,” Lillie Moss, who raided her retirement fund to buy an investment kit at the Dayton event, [said of Mr. Trump.](#)

The tax records show that another series of speaking engagements, sponsored by the Learning Annex, paid Mr. Trump \$7.3 million for events with titles like “Real Estate Wealth Expo: One Weekend Can Make You a Millionaire.” A book he co-wrote with the Annex’s founder, “Think Big and Kick Ass: In Business and Life,” earned him royalties of \$1.4 million.

NEWS IN THE NEWS

As the years went on, and the success of “The Apprentice” made Mr. Trump a household name far beyond New York, the chasm between truth and hyperbole widened. It was one thing to bray about his late mother — a multimillionaire with a maid and a Rolls-Royce — using All laundry detergent. Now, he was flogging things that could hurt people economically.

In what would be his most lucrative side deal, he teamed up with a multilevel marketing company, ACN, whose clients were told they could make a living from home by selling video phones, satellite television and other services. Investigated in several countries, ACN has [left a trail](#) of complaints that people were suckered into spending far more than they earned trying to peddle the company’s products.

Regulators in France concluded that “only 1 percent of people recruited could claim a satisfactory income,” and that the rest lost money or, at most, made about \$35 a month, according to court records. Montana officials came to a similar conclusion, finding that the average participant in that state paid ACN about \$750 in various fees but got back only \$53.

ACN, which has never admitted wrongdoing while settling [legal actions](#) by state regulators, claims its business model is misunderstood; [on its website](#), it once posted a page helpfully titled “The Difference in ACN and a Pyramid Scheme.” A class-action lawsuit pending against Mr. Trump and his family asserts that the Trump brand became central to ACN’s business strategy, citing one

NEWS IN THE NEWS

In his sales pitches, Mr. Trump frequently boasted that he “owned buildings all over” Manhattan. Actually, although at one point “Trump” was emblazoned on at least 17 buildings, Mr. Trump owns all or a portion of only a half-dozen. Many of the others he had developed decades earlier and then sold, before his casino bankruptcies made credit harder to come by.

With the prospect of building suddenly less viable, Mr. Trump explored licensing his name to other developers' projects. The idea gained traction after an obscure developer, Bayrock Group, started leasing office space on the 24th floor of Trump Tower, directly below Mr. Trump's headquarters. At about \$400,000 a year, and a total of \$2.2 million by the time the lease ended, according to the tax records, it proved a good investment for Bayrock, which used its proximity to pitch project ideas to Mr. Trump.

Bayrock was a bit of a mystery. Its founder, Tevfik Arif, was a former Soviet-era official from Kazakhstan whose 2003 financial statement, showing \$70 million in assets, had a caveat saying his own accountant could not vouch for it. Mr. Arif's right hand was Felix Sater, a Russian émigré with ties to mobsters, who sometimes went by another name to obscure his criminal past.

CONTRACT LAWSUITS AND FOREIGN HOTELS

Unlike his Chicago tower, where he became embroiled in lawsuits over hundreds of millions of dollars in construction loans, Mr. Trump's SoHo hotel was essentially risk-free for him. His tax records show that, between licensing and management fees, Trump companies involved in the project ultimately netted as much as \$9 million, even though they did not build or finance it.

Awash in new licensing offers while riding the "Apprentice" wave, Mr. Trump in 2007 inaugurated the Trump Hotel Collection, with an emphasis on foreign projects. It was largely aspirational: A new website listed "future properties" in Toronto, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Scotland and Dubai, among other locations.

But the fees were already pouring in. Mr. Trump's profits from licensing deals, which in 2003 barely registered, climbed to \$1.3 million two years later and then skyrocketed, hitting \$29.7 million in 2010 before steadily declining, according to his tax records.

Because of how the licensing agreements were drafted, with sizable fees up front, Mr. Trump stood to gain even if a project failed. Of the 10 "future properties" initially listed on the hotel collection's website, three never got off the ground, and five others either were not completed or later severed ties with Mr. Trump. Yet he still managed to collect a total of \$46 million from them.

GOLF COURSES IN THE RED

Flush with new cash, Mr. Trump bought luxurious golf courses that would fall deep into the red.

While Mr. Trump's tax returns tell the story of how reality TV and its reflected glow made him rich, they also shed some light on an enduring question that has generated much [head-scratching](#), if not [dark speculation](#): Where did he get hundreds of millions of dollars to buy and prop up his golf resorts?

Mr. Trump had only two open golf courses and two more undergoing renovations at the time of his plunge into television, but golf — a pastime that he “spent an inordinate amount of time on,” his niece, Mary Trump, wrote in her recent family tell-all — always seemed destined to become his next financial sand trap.

“I have the best buildings in Manhattan. I have the best casinos in New Jersey. I build a great product,” [Mr. Trump boasted](#) to a reporter in 2002. “I actually have more fun building courses than I do playing.”

Beginning in 2006, and continuing over the next decade, he would accumulate 11 more golf courses, forming a new core of what he describes as his empire.

The amount of capital Mr. Trump has spent on his golf properties is staggering and has echoes of his earlier, ultimately disastrous, embrace of casinos. During a three-year period starting in 2014, he pumped \$144.5 million into his Turnberry golf course in Scotland, his tax returns show, even as the property has continued booking losses year after year. He has put \$213 million into his Doral resort in Florida with similar results.

BORROWING AGAINST EQUITY

Meanwhile, Mr. Trump's main source of income — “The Apprentice” and licensing deals — went into a steep decline starting in 2011, falling, along with the show's ratings, from \$51 million that year to \$21 million by 2014, and eventually to less than \$3 million in 2018.

Which is where those unsubstantiated theories of secret payments from Russia or the mob come in.

His tax records provide more mundane answers. They reveal that as he was pouring money into the golf resorts, he also pulled money out of other places in ways that suggested an immediate need. In 2012, he borrowed \$100 million against his equity in Trump Tower in Manhattan, one of his more valuable properties. A year later, he withdrew \$95.8 million from his share of a real estate partnership that owns buildings in New York and California. And in 2014, he sold \$98 million in stocks and bonds.

These one-time maneuvers, coupled with the more than \$427 million from “The Apprentice” and licensing deals, would probably have provided enough cash to cover his golf course investments. But they cannot be repeated, and in at least one case — the Trump Tower mortgage — they need to be paid back.

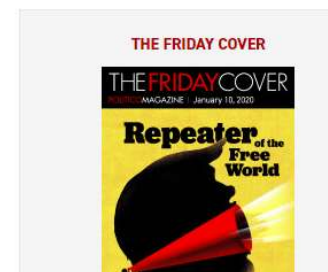
THE BIGGEST FLIP



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The house wasn't built for a Russian oligarch, although it looked the part. The 62,000-square-foot, 17-bedroom mansion is a palace of new-money flash, featuring Greek fountains, tennis courts, trompe l'oeil murals, underground parking for dozens of cars, and a 100-foot swimming pool and hot tub overlooking the ocean. It even had a faux-aristocratic name: "Maison de l'Amitie," or the House of Friendship. It was the trophy of a Boston-area nursing home magnate, until he lost his



THE BIGGEST FLIP

On Wednesday, Trump angrily insisted that he has “nothing to do with Russia,” and said that he has no investments in the country.

He did, however, grant one pointed exception: Maison de l’Amitie. “The closest I came to Russia, I bought a house a number of years ago in Palm Beach, Florida,” Trump told reporters. “I bought the house for \$40 million and I sold it to a Russian for \$100 million including commissions.”

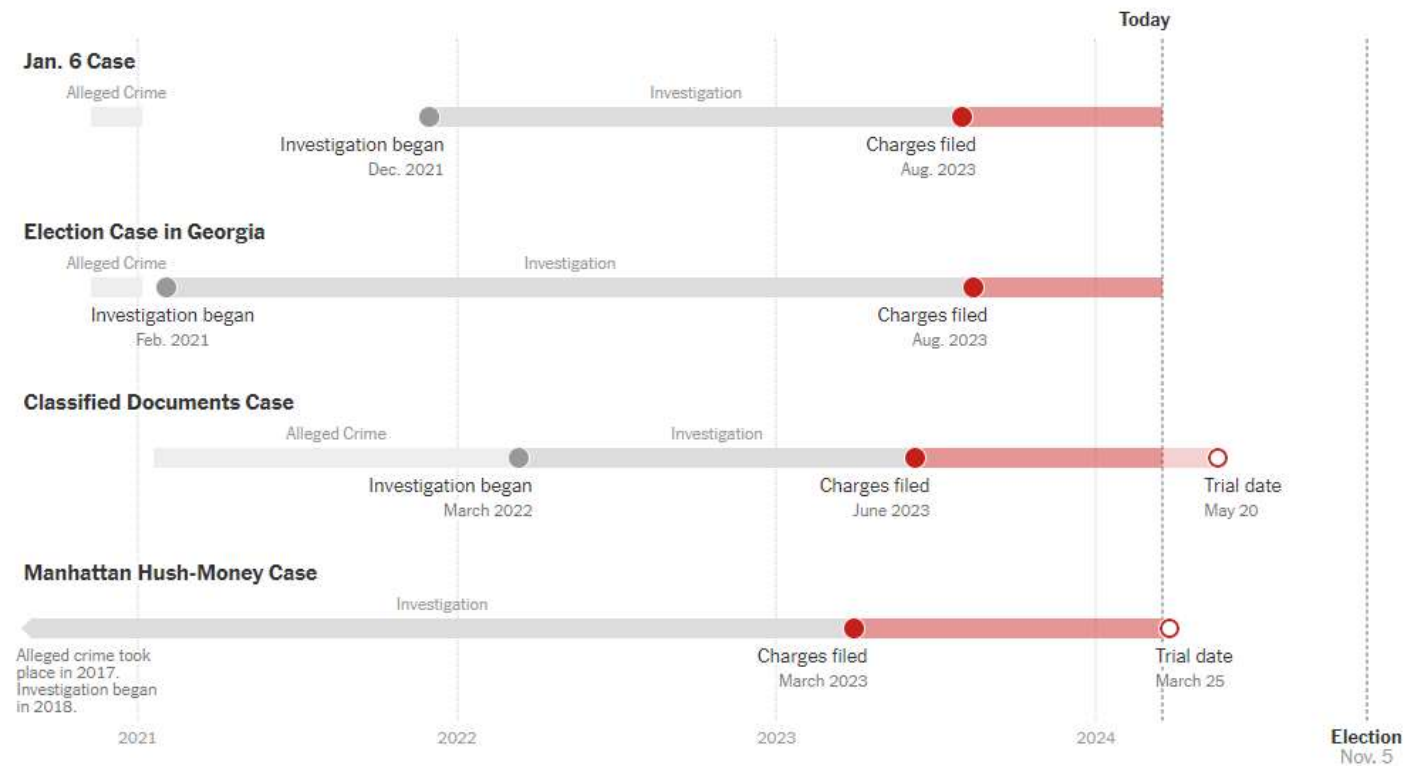
“ It is also a story of a classic Trump deal: a lucrative flip, figures on both sides that don’t really add up, and at the center, a house that may not have been what either party claimed.

Why did a Russian billionaire pay Trump so much money for a house the new owner is believed never to have set foot in, which he has denied owning, and which he now intends to tear down? The answer offers an important window into Trump’s kinship with Russia’s oligarchs, and what he likely sees in them as business allies. It is also a story of a classic Trump deal: a lucrative flip, figures on both sides that don’t really add up, and at the center, a house that may not have been what either party claimed.

NEXT UP


What Comes Next?

Mr. Trump has been indicted in four inquiries, with the cases expected to unfold as he runs for president again.



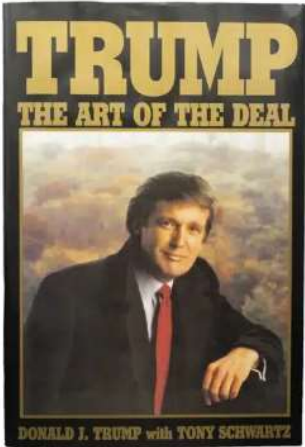
By Charlie Smart, Lazaro Gamio, Molly Cook Escobar, Charlie Savage and Alan Feuer. Additional work by Eli Murray.

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SWAMP CHRONICLES

IS FRAUD PART OF THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION'S BUSINESS MODEL?

A new investigation shows a pattern in different projects around the country and the world.

By Adam Davidson
October 17, 2018

What, exactly, is Donald Trump's business? The Trump Organization is unusual in that it doesn't appear to do the same thing for very long. It was a builder of apartments for the lower middle class, then a builder of luxury buildings and hotels, then a casino company, and, most recently, a brand-licensing firm, selling its name to anybody who wanted "TRUMP" emblazoned on a building, bottled water, or whatever else. These are wildly different businesses. The way a company raises money, plans projects,



OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

Course Overview

- First class: Current events and how to keep up with them
- Second class: The father and the son: The early days, the mob and scandals
- Third class: Building blocks: Businesses, brands, busts and bankruptcies
- Fourth class: The comeback: Smoke, mirrors of mirrors, and media

OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

- Fifth class: From Russia with the Love – Again : Past and ongoing international affairs, security risks, and laundering
- Sixth class: Without conscience: Racist, predator, fascist and the militia
- Seventh class: Political animals: Candidate, officeholder, impeached, indicted and the money and people behind and around him
- Eighth class: It's a wrap -Not: Trump's last chapter, the MAGA movement and the journey to election day