

The Changing of the Guard

The meteoric rise to the White House

In a resounding rebuke to the American political establishment, the world woke up to a new and unexpected reality on 9 November, 2016. Against all the odds with nothing more than one opinion poll accurately predicting the result, the USC/L.A. Times Poll, a triumphant Donald J. Trump stood tall and proud as he swept away the 2016 race to the White House from the clutches of Hillary Rodham Clinton in an election that will, beyond any doubt, go down as one of the biggest electoral upsets in American history.

From George Washington to Barack Obama, all U.S. Presidents can account for either a military background, a political background, or, a blend of both. In a first of its kind, Donald Trump, the 45th President, has neither, as he comes from a world of business. He was neither drafted into the U.S. Army, nor has he held a position in public office; whereas his opponent in the race served four years as a U.S. Secretary of State under the Obama administration, and eight years prior as a Senator for New York (a role she accomplished after acquiring political know-how as First Lady of the United States). Her CV arguably outflanked that of Trump's, and she may well have won were it not for a plethora of setbacks. The conspicuousness of Clinton's frail health was laid bare on the campaign trail, e.g. during a memorial commemorating 9/11, she collapsed and had to be driven away en route to hospital. When she got discharged, mere hours later, she made a faux pas by telling the gathered press: "*It's a beautiful day in New York!*"; a quote best made by diplomats any day but on the 11th of September, notwithstanding the furore surrounding the email controversy. During her tenure as Secretary of State, Clinton had made use of her family's private email server for official communications rather than official State Department email accounts maintained on federal servers, of which an estimated 31,000 emails were deleted in an alleged cover-up addressing the 2012 Benghazi attack on the U.S. Embassy. Her popularity suffered as a consequence. Her aspirations were ultimately dashed by stale economics insofar that a cross-section of conservative Americans became disenchanted with the Obama administration, and came to view the prospects of a Clinton presidency as a preservation of the old guard.

In contrast, the American electorate conjectured that a Trump presidency would inject impetus into the economy and reinvigorate the middle class. They found congeniality in Trump's unorthodox style of communication, spurred on by his campaign slogan to 'Make America Great Again'. His business acumen resonated with millions of white working-class voters across the South, Plains and the Rust Belt who cared little for the fact that Clinton released her tax returns for the last 40 years, whilst Trump made no such records public, and had not paid any personal income tax since declaring in 1995 a \$916 million loss on his tax returns, thus enabling him to use a tax loophole to avoid paying federal income tax for the next 18 years. The Republican hierarchy was left in a quandary on how to proceed with Trump's nomination to the GOP, prompting two former Republican Presidents, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush, to declare on record their refusal to throw their weight behind the newly elected Republican leader.

Donald Trump's rallies drew proportionally more attendees than Hillary Clinton could muster. His popularity was boosted by his television appearances, most notably on the hit reality series *The Apprentice* where he became a household name as a tycoon.

Precedents have been set wherein politicians were boosted by reality television. Boris Johnson was a member of parliament for the Henley constituency, before he unseated Ken Livingstone as Mayor of London in 2008. *Have I Got News For You* is a popular BBC television show which was occasionally fronted by Johnson as a guest presenter. In doing so, he opened himself up to a nationwide audience, becoming a familiar face to millions blissfully basking in the buffoonery of his outlandish, gaffe-prone persona. Ken Livingstone, ironically appearing on the show as a guest panellist, later recounted how it was through this formula that he was overhauled in the polls for the mayoralty. What worked for Boris Johnson had worked just as well for Donald Trump.