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by NICHOLAS LEVIS  
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## Empire of Fraud, Made in America

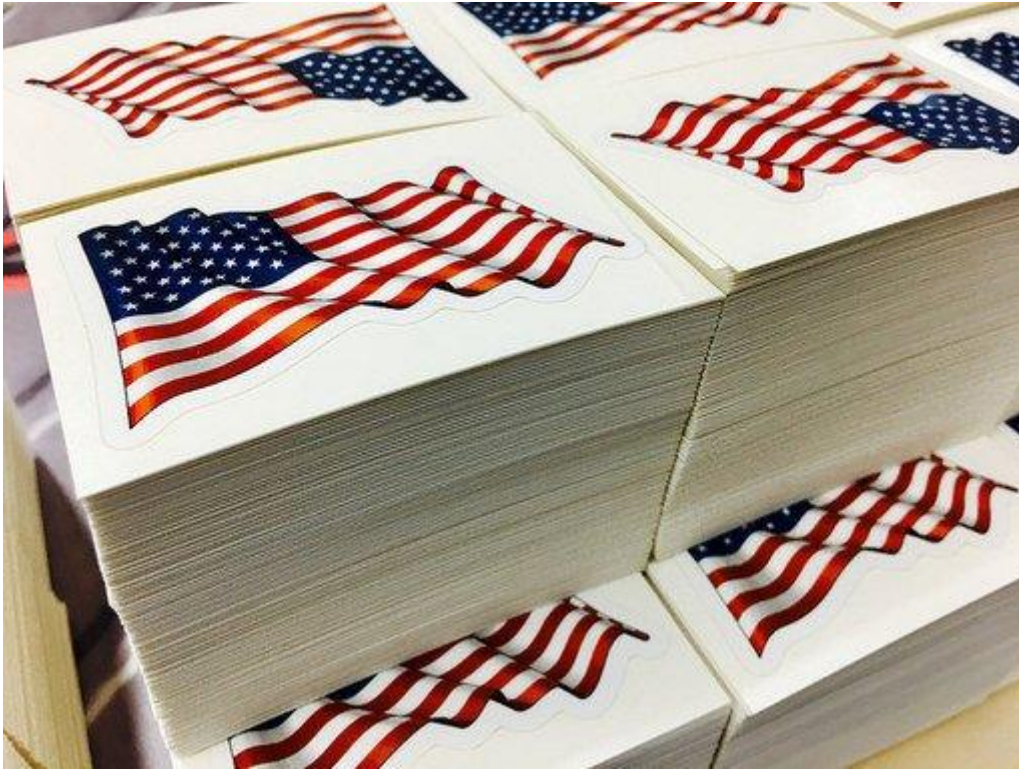


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Lest it be washed out by the next Spectacle, allow me to summarize the most important article yet about the Life of Trump, and to make explicit a couple of the explosive points that the [New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/) only implies.

On the front end, Fred Trump's fortune drew from decades of post-World War II federal housing development loans and subsidies worth tens of millions. On the back end, tax evasion was vast, multifarious and constant. That was the business model. Properties were wildly undervalued, expenses inflated, revenues hidden. Tenants were systematically victimized. The family cultivated a deep contempt for the government that provided them with such largesse.

Over decades, hundreds of millions were shifted from Fred to his children via untaxed gift-loans and hidden property-transfer schemes. Donald received tens of millions in such never-to-be-repaid "loans" on a near-quarterly basis, contrary to his ridiculous legend that he made billions starting with nothing more than a million-dollar stake from Fred. A friend of the family enacted one payoff from Fred to Donald by buying 3.5 million in casino chips and leaving Atlantic City without making a bet. In Fred's final years, the children set up a scam company that overcharged on building services to drain the father's holding companies of \$50 million in excess cash. After Fred's death, his properties were assessed at a small fraction of the value, allowing the children to evade at least \$50 million in estate taxes. The IRS let almost all of this pass, sometimes making minor revisions in assessments. All of the late father's holdings were sold in 2004 at near full value for more than \$800 million.

The lion's share of all this went to the "self-made" son and chosen successor, Donald. He was probably never a billionaire until recently, but for many years a gambler entangled in many schemes, often on the knife's edge of ruin. He got away with it in large part thanks to the corporate media.

The New York Times confesses to jump-starting Donald's celebrity career with a 1976 puff-piece that legitimated his absurd claim that his personal net wealth was \$200 million. This helped launch him as a suitor in the lobbies of higher-level finance. Today the paper describes their own article as a con-job. This kind of media coverage became routine and enabled the many side-scams based on the Trump name: the airline, the golf clubs, the steaks, the "university." Trump was made synonymous with the good life, with the American vision of success.

Now, finally, the Times presents the underbelly they mostly failed to cover for 42 years, drawing on thousands of documents to expose the workings of a crime family. Nothing about it is surprising, but confirmation in this much detail is big news. This was never a "business" in the sense that many Americans still believe.

Three vital takeaways:

(1) Of course, the system is designed to favor the rich, but tax evasion and scams with public money on this scale for this long do not happen without protection. New York developers exploiting government welfare in the postwar era could hardly have avoided collaboration with the mobsters that controlled the construction trades and the protection rackets, but this is not merely a truism. The Trump links to New York-New Jersey mafia figures and their shared lawyers (like Roy Cohn) are known. The most explosive implications still need to be told: payoffs to officials, bought politicians, the likelihood of blackmail and extortion. In the Donald years, this morphed into global money laundering through real estate and casinos. For all the legal mutations and shell-games, the resulting concerns remain active today. Anything done after 2012 is still liable to prosecution.

(2) Given that, and with this piece landing on the desks of attorney generals from New York to California, the speculation no longer appears outlandish that Trump needs to get Kavanaugh seated before the Supreme Court considers the Gamble “double jeopardy” case, which could neutralize state-level investigations into Trump Organization emoluments and scams.

(3) The corporate media was complicit at every stage. They did not report on the businesses. They did not take up the investigative research published by the likes of David Cay Johnston, Wayne Barrett, and several others starting already in the 1980s. They did devote decades of puff to the fake playboy. This relationship blossomed into 14 seasons of The Apprentice, the WWE venture, and the years of uninterrupted transmission of his every poisonous word that powered the presidential campaign, long before the first primary. Today they still enable him by coddling the violent, racist politics as “populist” and, paradoxically, by pretending anything bad about the regime is the product of an obscure foreign conspiracy.