

LUCKY PEACH



EDIBLE TRUMP

Defondant Trump

On Donald Trump's unique ability to get into lawsuits.

By LAUREN GARFINKEL

Art by LAUREN GARFINKEL

“We’re going to have professors and adjunct professors that are absolutely terrific, terrific people, terrific brains, successful, we’re going to have the best of the best. And, honestly, if you don’t learn from them, if you don’t learn from me, if you don’t learn from the people that we’re going to be putting forward, and these are all people that are handpicked by me, then you’re just not going to make it in terms of the world of success.” — Donald Trump, Trump University promotional video

“I don’t know the people. I wasn’t running it. I don’t know the people.” — Donald Trump, when pressed about the identities and qualifications of Trump University instructors; Trump University lawsuit deposition, December 2015

Donald Trump has sued or been sued some four thousand times. This year, he is currently a defendant in one civil and two federal cases involving Trump University, the education company he co-founded with two associates in 2004.

From 2005 to 2010, Trump University offered classes meant to impart business acumen and real-estate know-how. Fees ranged from \$1,495 for an introductory seminar to \$35,000 for the “Gold Elite” mentored program. More than seven thousand tickets were sold. Enrollees were advised to raise the limit on their credit cards in order to purchase courses at Trump University. In all, Trump University brought in \$40 million.

A former Trump University salesman described Trump University as “a fraudulent scheme” that “preyed upon the elderly and uneducated to separate them from their money.”

Twenty-five percent of Trump University customers, dissatisfied with the product they received, were refunded their fees.

The civil suit was filed in 2013 by New York attorney general Eric Schneiderman against Trump University (or “Trump Entrepreneur Initiative,” its legal name) for posing as something it was not. Trump University was not accredited, did not offer degrees or grades, and was thus fraudulent in calling itself a “university.” “It’s like selling someone what you say is a Mercedes, and it turns out to be a Volkswagen.” It doesn’t matter if they like the Volkswagen, “it’s still fraud.”

Then there are the federal cases against Trump University.

In *Cohen v. Trump*, also filed in 2013, Donald Trump has been named the sole defendant. It’s a class-action suit that cites the businessman’s false promises to Trump University students as grounds for racketeering charges.

In *Makaeff v. Trump University, LLC*, filed in 2010, a disgruntled former Trump U. client claimed fraud and breach of contract. In 2014, U.S. District Court Judge Gonzalo Curiel allowed the lawsuit to include Trump University customers in California, New York and Florida, in deference to consumer protection laws in each state. In 2016, the case was renamed *Low v. Trump*

University, LLC, with Sonny Low replacing Tarla Makaeff as the lead plaintiff. Judge Curiel is also presiding in the Cohen case.

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump has denounced the Indiana-born judge as having a natural bias due to his Mexican heritage. As Trump explained it, “I’m building a wall. It’s an inherent conflict of interest.” (Curiel is the son of Mexican immigrants.)

Trump’s lawyers have yet to ask that the case be reassigned, despite their client’s certainty of the judge’s lack of impartiality. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan has described Trump’s Curiel critique as “the textbook definition of racism.”

Another sensational aspect of this case is that Florida attorney general Pam Bondi, in 2013, decided not to join the class-action suit against Trump University days after receiving a \$25,000 campaign contribution from the Donald J. Trump Foundation. Aside from the appearance of “pay to play” tactics, it is illegal for charitable organizations to make political donations. In the primaries, Trump famously bragged, “I give to everybody. When they call, I give. And you know what? When I need something from them, two years, three years later, I call them, they are there for me. That’s a broken system.”

In depositions from the last year, Donald Trump admitted that he had nothing to do with the hiring of Trump University instructors at live events. He did not recognize any of their names and could not pick any of them out of a lineup presented to him in court. The transcript, published in full by the *Washington Post*, is a better kicker to this story than anything I could write.

DONALD TRUMP, EDIBLE TRUMP, FONDANT, TRUMP
