

Oprah for President? Why Not?

The Cecil B. DeMille Award is an honorary Golden Globe recognizing “outstanding contributions to the world of entertainment,” first bestowed (upon its namesake filmmaker) in 1952. On January 7, Oprah Winfrey, the first African-American woman to receive the prize, accepted with a rousing speech that has fans calling for a 2020 presidential run. *CNN Money* reports that friends say she’s “actively thinking” about it.

Just a few short years ago, the idea of a president without prior experience in political office was nearly unthinkable. Prior to 2016, the last major party nominee, let alone president, with no political resume was Dwight D. Eisenhower, who, you may remember, whipped Hitler in World War Two.

And then came Donald Trump.

Like Oprah, The Donald is a billionaire and a former television personality. It seems that being a sitting or former state governor or US Senator (or general) is no longer a requirement for the top slot in American politics (the only president ever elected from the House of Representatives was James Garfield in 1880).

Apart from what one might think of his actual tenure in office, it’s far from obvious that Trump is more qualified than Winfrey for the post.

He’s a billionaire. She’s a billionaire.

He inherited wealth generated by sweetheart government housing contracts and managed to parlay it into larger wealth by leveraging political favors and massive debt, fleeing his failures the bankruptcy wolves neared their doors.

She’s the child of a poor single mother in Mississippi who turned her high school radio gig into Chicago’s, then America’s, top-rated talk show and successful careers in writing, publishing, acting, and film production. She became the richest African-American of the 20th century and the world’s first black female billionaire in the world.

Prior to Trump’s presidential campaign, there’s little doubt which of the two was more politically influential. Trump occasionally addressed politics with off-hand one-liners and feints toward running for office, fairly obviously as a way of building his personal business brand recognition rather than as a serious approach to issues or policy.

Winfrey, on the other hand, consciously spent decades establishing herself as an opinion leader on issues ranging from acceptance of LGBTQ Americans to the US invasion of Iraq to animal cruelty. She turned out tens of thousands of rally attendees — and likely hundreds

of thousands of voters — for Barack Obama in 2008, probably making possible his victory over Hillary Clinton in the Democratic Party's presidential primaries.

She also enjoys an advantage in the Democratic Party to the extent that she doesn't seem to have dragged herself and others through the mud in the 2016 party in-fighting. She's likely more popular at the party's center than Hillary Clinton, and nearly as popular as Bernie Sanders on all but its furthest left fringes.

In my opinion, Oprah would beat The Donald like a drum in a presidential contest. I disagree with both of them on too many issues to vote for either one, but I relish a contest to which representatives of the failed political establishment aren't invited.