The Language of Fashion: A Semiotic and Sociocultural Study of the Trump Women's Inauguration Attire(2025)

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Abstract

Fashion works as a complex semiotic organization, especially during political spectacles where visual appearance often strengthens ideological messaging. This research explores the fashion adoptions of main female characters at Donald Trump's 2025 presidential inauguration exactly Melania Trump, Ivanka Trump, Usha Vance, and Tiffany Trump. Moving from semiotics, sociology of fashion, and cultural theory, this paper claims that their tailored decisions work as designed visual rhetoric calculated to express authority, political alignment, class distinction, and gender performance.

This study uses qualitative visual analysis of high-resolution media images and fashion reporting to decode the symbolic meanings embedded in the garments of prominent women affiliated with Trumpism, focusing on color palettes, accessories, silhouettes, and designer affiliations. It observes a shift from the pastel-toned, idealized "First Lady" aesthetic of 2017 toward a more militarized, rigid, and elite-coded style referred to as "authoritarian chic" by 2025. This stylistic transition mirrors broader ideological shifts during Donald Trump's second presidential term, particularly those involving gender traditionalism, nationalist rhetoric, and the visual construction of class-based separation. The research aims at investigating how fashion works not as plain decoration, but as a potent device of

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political communication that transfers power, ideology, and identity. It's main questions are: 1-how fashion choices reveal or strengthen political messages, 2-how femininity is fashioned through conservative visual culture, and 3- how clothing may serve to show both ideological loyalty and authority . The research hypothesizes that:1-these fashion changes align with increased nationalist themes, support traditional gender roles while offering a controlled form of public authority, 2-deliberately use visual markers of uniqueness to establish elite distinction. Finally, 3- it discusses that fashion in such context is a curated political language that exposes the deeper cultural and ideological undercurrents of modern American conservatism.

Key Words: *Fashion, semiotics, Sociology of Fashion, Cultural Capital, Authoritarian Chic.*

لغة الموضة: دراسة سيميائية وسوسيوثقافية لأزياء النساء في حفل تنصيب ترامب2025

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المستخلص

تُعَدّ الموضة نظامًا سيميائيًا معقَّدًا، لا سيما في المناسبات السياسية حيث تُستخدم المظاهر البصرية لتعزيز الرسائل الأيديولوجية. تتناول هذه الدراسة اختيارات الأزياء لنساء بارزات في حفل تنصيب ترامب عام 2025، وهنّ: ميلانيا ترامب، إيفانكا ترامب، أوشا فانس، وتيفاني ترامب. انطلاقًا من السيمائيات وسيسيولوجيا الموضة والنظرية الثقافية، تعتبر الدراسة أن هذه الأزياء ليست مجرد ذوق شخصي، بل أدوات بلاغية بصريّة تهدف إلى التعبير عن السلطة، والانتماء السياسي، والتميّز الطبقي، والأدوار الجندرية. تعتمد المنهجية على تحليل بصري نوعي لصور عالية الدقة وتقارير صحفية، مع التركيز على الألوان، والقصّات، والإكسسوار، والمصمّمين. وتلاحظ الدراسة تحوّلًا من الأسلوب الأنثوي الناعم في 2017 إلى نمط أكثر نخبوية وعسكرية في 2025، بما يعكس تصاعد القومية والمحافظة الجندرية في عهد ترامب الثاني. تفترض الدراسة أن هذه الأزياء تعكس رسائل سياسية مقصودة، تعزّز التميّز الطبقي، وتعيد إنتاج صورة الأنوثة المحافظة بصريًا. وتُظهِر الموضة هنا كلغة سياسية تعبّر عن السلطة والانتماء الأيديولوجي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الموضة، السيمائيات، سيسيولوجيا الموضة، رأس المال الثقافي، الأناقة السلطوية.

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1. Introduction

Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration presented more than a political spectacle, it is supposed to be a strategic fashion ceremony by the women nearby him. Melania Trump, Ivanka Trump, Tiffany Trump, and Usha Vance, experienced their attire to deliver messages of tradition, power, and femininity. This paper explores how their fashioned clothes worked as a system of political communication, conveying ideology and social identity.   Regarding semiotics, sociology of fashion, and cultural capital theory, this study asks how these fashion picks conveyed sense of deep messages within the comprehensive context of Trump's second term. Through full visual and discourse analysis, the study examines how political femininity and elite aesthetics were achieved on this worldwide stage.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper practices a multidisciplinary theoretical approach to interpret how fashion at Trump's 2025 inauguration works as a system of political communication. The main frameworks include:

2.1 Roland Barthes - Semiotics of Fashion

Roland Barthes (1967) theorized fashion as a language of signs, where garments convey both connotative (cultural) as well as denotative (literal) meanings. These semiotic cues empower the analysis of visual lens such as silhouette, color, and texture as symbolic acts. For example, Melania Trump's navy coat plus her wide-brimmed hat may be seen as signs of restraint, authority, or even isolation, depending on cultural relations with militarism or aristocracy.

"Clothing is never a neutral object; it always carries meaning." (ibid, The Fashion System).

2.2 Joanne Entwistle - Sociology of Fashion

Joanne Entwistle (2000) shows fashion as a "situated bodily practice", deep-rooted in daily life and designed by gender roles, social norms, and institutional expectations. Her work condenses how the body is both socially structured and publicly shown through dress. considering that, Ivanka Trump's usage of vintage Dior silhouettes accomplishes a coded femininity that mergers conservatism with elite ambition.

"Dress is the interface between the body and the social world." (ibid, The Fashioned Body).

2.3 Pierre Bourdieu – Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1984) posits fashion taste as a system of cultural capital used to differentiate elite status and strengthen class hierarchies. The Trump women's designer adoptions (e.g., Oscar de la Renta, Dior ,Adam Lippes) function as status markers, supporting Trumpian nationalism when American brands are selected and cosmopolitan elitism when European houses are worn.

"Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier." (ibid, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste).

2.4 Authoritarian Chic

Although not a recognized academic theory, fashion critics (e.g., The Guardian, 2025) have branded a trend they call **"authoritarian chic"**, where fashion inducements on aesthetics of discipline, control, and power. Melania's face-shielding hat and firm tailoring align with this trend, bulging emotional space and symbolic authority during an ideologically powerful political event.

3. Context & Data
Main Figures & Designers:

i. **Melania Trump***:* Navy silk-wool dresscoat by Adam Lippes (NY-made), ivory blouse, navy boater hat by Eric Javits; the gloves, and heels.
ii. **Ivanka Trump***:* Forest- green Dior skirt suit and beret at ceremony; re-formed Audrey Hepburn–style Givenchy dress with opera gloves at ball.
iii. **Usha Vance***:* Baby-pink Oscar de la Renta coat-dress, a nod to Kennedy-era aesthetics.
iv. **Tiffany Trump**: Chocolate-brown chiffon gown by the famous Lebanese designer Zuhair Murad with lop-sided one-shoulder and cape sleeve.

4. Visual Semiotic Analysis

1. Melania's Joint:

a. *Color & Structure:* Navy and ivory express neutrality, authority, and formality; gloves and designed tailoring evoke military restraint.
b. *Boater Hat:* Wide brim shadows her face, forming distance and mystique, "queenly aura" or somber wartime widow.
c. *National Signifier:* Adam Lippes is American-made; supports Trump's "buy American" politics.

2. Ivanka's Dual Looks:

a. *Ceremony Suit:* Forest green, a traditional but distinct statement, promised but demure.
b. *Ball Dress:* Refashioning Hepburn's Sabrina gown reflects classic elite femininity; critique comprehend it as forced symbolism of American Dream.

3. Usha Vance:

a. Pastel pink Renta dress arouses 1960s glamour and echoes Jackie Kennedy's iconic style.

4. Tiffany Trump:

a. **Color & Silhouette:** Chocolate-brown chiffon gown signs understated elegance and maturity, deviating from the more vibrant or organized looks of other family members.
b. **Design Specifics:** The lop-sided one-shoulder and cape sleeve enhance a contemporary twist, matching classic grace with modern fashion modernization.
c. **Jewelry & Footwear:** Diamond pieces by Nigerian-American brand Jovadi highlight global cultural consciousness and personal identity; black stilettos present an edgy sophistication, signifying subtle power dressing.

5. Sociocultural & Political Interpretation

Character	Main Message	Contextual Meaning
Melania	Authority, reserve, American identity	Visual "shield" against scrutiny; messaging of elite, controlled first lady.
Ivanka	Elite womanhood & American Dream	Duality of political decorum and aspirational femininity.
Usha Vance	Elegance & traditional First Lady diplomacy	Reinforces conservative fashion lineage.
Tiffany	Understated elegance & modern sophistication	Signals mature confidence, cultural awareness, and subtle power dressing distinct from more overt displays of status.

6. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative visual analysis to study the political messaging surrounded in the inauguration attire of Trump's women in 2025. High-resolution images from sources like Getty, Reuters, CNN, and Vogue were chosen and cross-referenced with fashion journalism. Main visual elements—like color, silhouette, and accessories—were coded via Fashionpedia classifications. These were then semiotically investigated through Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation, and interpreted using Entwistle's vision of fashion as a social practice. Lastly, media reactions from outlets like The New York Times, The Guardian, and CNN were examined to comprehend public and critical reception.

7. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this paper engaged a qualitative multimodal approach, uniting visual semiotic analysis, sociocultural interpretation, and discourse analysis. The aim was to interpret how fashion at Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration operated as a textual and symbolic structure, with each sartorial superior contributing to a wider ideological narrative.

7.1 Visual Data

The Data collected consist of images gathered from credible sources such as *Vogue*, *Getty Images*, *Reuters*, *The Guardian*, *CNN Style*, and *ABC News*. These images concentrated specifically on:

- The ceremonial outfits worn by Melania Trump, Ivanka Trump, Usha Vance, and Tiffany Trump
- Full-body shots, profile angles, and accessory close-ups

Each image was marked with metadata including:

- Figure (e.g., Ivanka Trump)
- Designer (e.g., Dior, Oscar de la Renta, Givenchy)
- Event setting (e.g., daytime ceremony)
- Visual descriptors (e.g., navy boater hat, pastel palette, dress detailing,)

7.2 Analytical Frameworks Applied

A. Semiotic Coding (Barthes)

By Barthes' semiotic coding model, each fashion appearance was analyzed into two levels:

- **Denotative level** - literal explanation of clothing: color, fabric, silhouette, accessories, and brand
- **Connotative level** - cultural associations (e.g., navy = patriotism).

Example:

- *Melania's navy Adam Lippes coat*: Denotes designed minimalism; connotes elite restraint, political sobriety, perhaps even authoritarian froideur.
- *Ivanka's Audrey Hepburn–style gown*: Denotes old-Hollywood glamour; connotes nostalgia, upper-class femininity, and a curated image of "American royalty."

B. Personification and Gender Performance (Entwistle)

This lens was practical to interpret how garments fashioned the wearer's bodily presentation:

- Posture and cut of clothing (e.g., Ivanka's cinched waist vs. Melania's straight-line tailoring)
- Coverage vs. Exposure (e.g., Tiffany Trump's asymmetric, one-shoulder chiffon gown vs. Usha Vance's high-collared, modest coat-dress)
- Gendered potentials of "appropriate" political femininity

Entwistle's theory permitted the analysis to discover how fashion acted as both expression and constraint, especially in formal political ceremonials.

C. Cultural Capital Analysis (Bourdieu)

The designer adoptions and styling decisions were valued through the lens of cultural capital, concentrating on:

- **American vs. European designers** (e.g., Dior and Givenchy vs. Adam Lippes and Oscar de la Renta)
- **Brand heritage** as a class pointer (e.g., Oscar de la Renta's relationship with White House tradition; Dior's elite European lineage)
- **Stylistic experimentation or conservatism** as a sign of cultural position (e.g., Ivanka's suit breaking from "First Lady" norms)

Sample Coded Image Data Table 1
Figure: Melania Trump
Occasion: Trump Inauguration Ceremony – January 20, 2025
Image Source: Getty Images / Vogue
Designer: Adam Lippes (coat), Eric Javits (hat)
Photographic Edge: Full body, frontal with downward gaze

Image (1-2): Melania Trump

Navy silk-wool dress-coat by Adam Lippes (NY-made), ivory blouse, navy boater hat by Eric Javits; gloves, heels

Analytical Classification	Data Coded	Interpretation	Theoretical Lens
Color	Navy blue	Conveys authority, conservatism, and military	(Barthes, 1967)(semiotics)

		precision; reinforces nationalist and somber tone	
Silhouette	Long, structured coat; sharp tailoring	Suggests discipline, emotional reserve, and elite distinction	(Entwistle,2000) (embodiment)
Accessories	Wide-brimmed navy boater hat; navy gloves; closed-toe pumps	The hat casts a shadow over her face—implies guardedness, distance, mystery; gloves evoke traditional First Lady decorum	Barthes & Authoritarian Chic
Designer Origin	American (Adam Lippes); hat from Eric Javits, NYC-based	Signals "Made in America" ideology—echoes Trump's economic nationalism	(Bourdieu,1984) (cultural capital)
Styling Comparison	Contrast to 2017 pastel Ralph Lauren ensemble	Visual shift from soft accessibility (2017) to austere formalism (2025); performs renewed strength or political militancy	Fashion discourse analysis
Media Reception	"Brimful of menace" (The Guardian, 2025); "Armored elegance" (Vogue)	Media interpreted look as severe, deliberate, queenly—narrative of controlled femininity amid political tension	Media discourse analysis
Cultural References	Echoes Jackie Kennedy's formality but with less warmth	References legacy, yet disrupts softness traditionally tied to First Ladies	Entwistle & Barthes

Sample Coded Image Data Table 2

Figure: Ivanka Trump
Occasion: Inauguration Day 2025 (Daytime Ceremony)
Image Source: Reuters / CNN Style
Designer: Dior (custom vintage-inspired coat dress)
Photographic Edge: Full body

Image (3&4): Ivanka Trump

Forest-green Dior skirt suit and beret at ceremony; recreated Audrey Hepburn–style Givenchy dress with opera gloves at ball

Analytical Classification	Data Coded	Interpretation	Theoretical Lens
Color	Ivory white	Traditionally associated with purity, peace, and femininity—consciously non-threatening political visual	(Barthes,1967) (semiotics)
Silhouette	1950s-inspired cinched waist, flared skirt	Evokes retro femininity and domestic ideal; draws on postwar aesthetic of conservative womanhood	(Entwistle, 2000) (gender performance)
Accessories	Pearls, soft wave hairstyle, matching ivory gloves	Refines the "classic American woman" look; strategic nod to 1950s First Lady archetypes	Barthes & Bourdieu
Designer Origin	European (Dior)	Shows preference for elite, old-world luxury; subtle distance from populist fashion nationalism	(Bourdieu, 1984) (cultural capital)
Styling Comparison	Similar to Grace Kelly / Audrey Hepburn	Uses Hollywood nostalgia to present glamour and respectability—bridges power and public charm	Fashion discourse

Media Reception	"A princess in the republic" (New York Times, 2025); "Ivory irony" (Slate)	Critiques of excess; praise for elegance; tension between political populism and elite display	Media discourse analysis
Cultural References	Dior New Look, Eisenhower-era style	Conjures conservative femininity but also retrogrades progress on gender visual narratives	Entwistle & Barthes

Sample Coded Image Data Table 3

Figure: Usha Vance
Event: Inauguration Day 2025
Image Source: Getty Images / AP News
Designer: Carolina Herrera (powder pink coat dress)
Photographic Edge: ¾ body, walking pose with J.D. Vance

Image (5&6): Usha Vance

Usha Vance: Baby-pink Oscar de la Renta coat-dress—a nod to Kennedy-era aesthetics

Analytical Classification	Data Coded	Interpretation	Theoretical Lens
Color	Powder pink	Soft, diplomatic, and maternal; plays into traditional gender tones without threatening political masculinity	(Barthes,1967) (semiotics)
Silhouette	Conservative midi-length, high neckline, gentle tailoring	Restraint, propriety, visual modesty—coded "good wife" image	(Entwistle, 2000) (bodily discipline)
Accessories	Minimal jewelry, small leather clutch, nude heels	Refined but not ostentatious; visual modesty and integration into political stage without flamboyance	Bourdieu (cultural modesty)
Designer Origin	American (Carolina Herrera, based in NYC)	Balances elite class with nationalist optics; Herrera's White House legacy (Nancy Reagan, Laura Bush)	(Bourdieu, 1984) (cultural capital)
Styling Comparison	Echoes mid-century senator's wife archetype	Carefully assimilated into conservative political style lineage	Entwistle & Media discourse
Media Reception	"Elegant, restrained, unthreatening" (Politico); "Traditionalist in tone" (Vogue)	Applauded for grace without spectacle—ideal GOP spousal image	Media framing
Cultural References	Jackie Kennedy minimalism; Laura Bush styling	Performance of genteel, supportive womanhood in political space	Barthes & Entwistle

Sample Coded Image Data Table 4
Figure : Tiffany Trump

Occasion : Inauguration Day 2025

Image Source : Vogue / Arab News / This Day Live

Designer : Zuhair Murad (chiffon gown and cape sleeve)

Photographic Edge : Front pose, walking shot, high-resolution media

Image (7&8): Tiffany Trump

Chocolate-brown chiffon gown by Lebanese designer Zuhair Murad with asymmetric one-shoulder and cape sleeve.

Analytical Classification	Data Coded	Interpretation	Theoretical Lens
Color	Chocolate-brown	Warm, grounded tone signifies maturity and subtle elegance; less attention-seeking than white or red	(Barthes, 1967) (semiotics)
Silhouette	Asymmetric one-shoulder chiffon with cape sleeve	Modern femininity with classical poise; flowing structure resists rigid power dressing norms	(Entwistle, 2000) (gender embodiment)
Accessories	Diamond earrings and ring by Jovadi; black stilettos	Quiet luxury; culturally conscious choice signals global taste and status without overt show	(Bourdieu, 1984) (cultural capital)
Designer Origin	Lebanese (Zuhair Murad); Nigerian-American (Jovadi jewelry)	International styling reflects diasporic influence and post-national fashion identity	(Bourdieu,ibid) (transnational capital)

Styling Comparison	Softer, more poetic than Ivanka or Melania	Avoids theatricality; frames her as graceful, reserved, and independent	Entwistle (feminine respectability politics)
Media Reception	"Effortlessly elegant" (Arab News); "A diplomatic fashion win" (This Day Live)	Positive press framed her as tastefully distinct and culturally attuned	Media discourse
Cultural References	Cape sleeve and soft draping echo Greco-Roman or Renaissance aesthetics	Mythic, ethereal femininity; emphasizes refinement over spectacle	Barthes (mythology of fashion)

8. Findings

1. Military fashioned style as political signs: Designed silhouettes, tones which can described as dark, and uniforms-like garments have been central to visually signing authority and ideological orientation, using fashion as a deliberate device of political branding.
2. Luxury as a marker of elite identity: The extensive use of high-end fashion markers and wisely curated styling stresses social distance and uniqueness.

9. Conclusion

This paper explored the composite relationship between fashion and political communication at Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration ceremony through a multidisciplinary lens integrating semiotics, sociology, and cultural capital theory. The sartorial picks of Melania Trump, Ivanka Trump, Usha Vance, and Tiffany Trump were not plain stylistic decisions but wisely orchestrated acts reflecting and strengthening the ideological narratives of gender, power, and class within the Trump administration.

Melania's serious, militaristic style personified the administration's themes of power and authority, expressing an image of emotional limit aligned with "authoritarian chic." and this corresponds to hypothesis of (Authoritarian chic and ideological alignment). Ivanka's vintage-inspired elegance appealed nostalgic ideals of elite status and femininity, serving as a unstiffening counterpoint to the political sight, and this may works to prove hypothesis of (Elite difference and symbolic capital). Usha Vance's traditional pastel ensembles stick to traditional political wife standards, stressing supportiveness and decorum ,and these two points shows that the hypothesis of (Controlled authority with traditional gender roles) is proved as well. while Tiffany Trump's modest yet cosmopolitan look presented a quieter custom of sophistication, avoiding overt symbolism in courtesy of mature elegance and understated global references. Her ensemble presented a graceful middle pounded between tradition and modernity, sparkly reflected a measured existence within the sight of political fashion.

The diverse use of American as opposed to European designers, and the tautness between traditionalism and modernity, exemplified the nuanced means cultural capital is mobilized to build political identities. Fashion here arises not only as private expression but as a system of symbolic capital that transfers power relations, ideological positioning, and gendered acts within a hyper facilitated political occasion.

Future study might cover this analysis to comparative studies of inauguration fashions through administrations or discover audience reception and social media discourse in more complexity, further unpacking the growing role of fashion in political hall.

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