Capturing the Political Climate of 2017

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CAPTURING THE POLITICAL CLIMATE OF 2017

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in the Journalism and Mass Communication

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All requirements for graduation with Honors in the Journalism and Mass Communication have been completed.

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MAKE AMERICA KIND AGAIN
Capturing the Political Climate of 2017

A Photo Essay on Living in Trump’s America
"Zhao?
I quickly walked up to the counter, Sir, my name is Zhao Li.

The officer looked at me and then looked at my passport photo. Making sure that I was me, the officer lead the way, follow me.

He took me to one of those cells behind the counter. The sign said inspection room and there was only a table inside and on top there was a computer. The officer walked in and sits directly at the chair facing the computer. I sat on the other side. He began to drill me with questions.

'Which university do you go to?'
'Did they expel you from the university? Did you get really bad grades last semester?'

He typed something on the computer that I couldn't see after each of my responses. I could just see the back of the computer.

'Are you trying to become an American citizen?'
'Are you sure? Are you lying to me right now?'

'Are you trying to change your immigration status? I don't know why he is repeating the same question but with different wording. Maybe he thinks I am not a native speaker and don't understand him."

'Do you have an American boyfriend?'
'So you don't have someone you want to marry here?'

'What's your GPA?'
'Are you sure you are not being dismissed by your university?'

'Okay. What's your major?'
'So you are taking German?'

'Why are you taking German? Do you want to become an American?'
'Do you have any proof? Does your school have student record or have you emailed your professor before? Show me the proof."

After staying there for 7 hours, I was finally allowed to leave. As I did, I thought back to four years ago during our family meeting, when my parents asked: 'Are you sure you don't want to study in Britain? Do you really want to go to the United States?'

'Yes, I do,' I had said, without a doubt. 'America is the most welcoming place in the world. I will be very happy there."

- Zhao Li
“Throughout the day on November 8 I was excited to vote. It was my first election where I was old enough to vote. I was very hopeful for Hillary Clinton and was honestly shocked watching the results come in. Initially, I was very emotional and upset with the situation. The next day, a lot of my professors focused their attention on the election and allowed students to discuss it.

Later, I reflected on the outcome and realized that I was not surprised. Although I was hopeful that our country would move forward and elect its first female president, I also knew our country’s constant battle with inclusion and equity across all identities, genders, race, age, and sexualities.

I consider myself pretty liberal, and growing up under the Obama administration I never felt personally attacked by our president. From the start of the Trump campaign I became fearful of the actions of one person and how it allowed for more people to express their hateful beliefs about people of different cultural backgrounds. I not only became fearful for myself, but also for younger generations, like my nieces, who will grow up under the Trump administration.

My nieces Jaxa, Maya, and Lashbeth are too young to be aware of political stances and executive orders, but my fear is that they will subconsciously grow up thinking that hate against communities of color, women, and LGBT is normal for our government.

I continue to be hopeful in this new era and continue to educate myself and others about the reality of our political climate and how it is affecting people.”

- Adalberno Castrobeda
In light of the 2016 election and our new president, I have felt a multitude of emotions; frustration, guilt, and motivated to name a few. I was frustrated with myself, my parents, friends, strangers. I confidently say this emotion was felt across the nation as billions of people watched as votes came in. Frustration with members of the nation who seem to look straight through their immigrant neighbors or simply ignore their family trees and their own heritage and not reflect with empathy and understanding. I was frustrated because I had not seen this coming and had not went through the process of becoming a citizen to cast my own vote, but who could have seen this coming? I was frustrated with myself because I could not step into the shoes of my friends who voted for this man, and see and understand what they did.

I was angry, I felt they voted against my family even though my family is not part of the population who is at the mercy of the president. I felt guilt. So much guilt. A few years ago, I felt the same guilt when a stranger asked to see my green card and told me her family had moved here with the same intentions as my own family but had not been so lucky and had been living here illegally. Now I feel it increasingly get heavier why is my immigration status not being questioned? Why should I feel safe walking through airports or on the street when millions of others shed tears and feared for their families and friends on inauguration day? Is it because I am white or don’t express my religious views through my wardrobe? Is it because the US has a healthy relationship with my home country?

After the initial shock of
My favorite folks are IMMIGRANTS (Hi Mom!)
"The night of the election, I was at Studio 13 to watch the votes come in and the Presidential Elect be announced. I don’t think that I’ll ever be able to forget the feeling of being in that space alongside other queer people and hearing the tally roll in state by state. It was the most ugly and heavy sadness I’ve ever felt in a room full of people. I ended up leaving early with a friend. We didn’t say much the entire walk home.

I was and still am filled with fear and anger. Every day I worry about being able to afford and have access to crucial reproductive healthcare in some of the most important years of my life. I worry about being able to afford to live and eat while paying off school loans. I worry about walking home alone at night. I worry about being murdered for turnng men down or being assaulted because I’m not straight.

I worry for all of my loved ones. I worry they will not come home. I worry they will be another headline, another deportation, another airport detention, another name in a hashtag. I worry about how they will be affected by living through this administration in fear of their gender, their sexuality, their skin color, their religion, their existence.

But every single day I also think about how as a queer woman who is middle class and white, I will still have less of a weight to bear than any trans/queer/POC friends and family. And I see that my place in the resistance of this administration is to lessen that weight wherever and whenever I can. That’s how we as white people can take part in this. It’s not enough to agree and be in solidarity with your words, this is a critical moment to actively challenge ourselves and..."
"I guess I never thought he would actually get elected until it happened... I have conservative friends, and I always try to get through to them, 'You know you're voting this way because you're only seeing things as a white male right?' And my friend's response to that was, 'Well I am a white male.'

What's hardest for me to understand is the large number of people that didn't even vote. But I can't really be angry at those people, because I didn't vote for Kerry in the Bush-Kerry election. My younger self was annoyed, thinking, 'That's the best we could do?'

My only hope is that she isn't old enough to remember his presidency."

- Nel Kelly, teacher at West Liberty High School and father to Rose
In January 2017, hundreds of Women’s Marches were held across the country and around the world to show solidarity and to protest the newly inaugurated president, Donald Trump. A crowd of 250,000 people gathered for the Women’s March on Chicago, making it one of the largest protests in city history.

- Chicago, IL, USA
“The atmosphere while walking to the polling station with my mom to vote for the president of the United States on the night of November 8, 2016 was one filled with excitement, jokes, and nostalgia for my late father who would have been excited to see another Clinton presidency. After voting, I made a heartfelt post about what it means to be a young immigrant woman and how we all have a voice in American society. I went to sleep soundly after a long week of examinations, with no doubt in my mind that America would have its first woman president. Imagine my surprise, disgust, disbelief, and ultimately, crippling fear when I woke up from a restless sleep to a living nightmare: Donald J. Trump was the 45th president of the United States. I checked multiple news channels murmuring no no no to myself. I called my mom over and asked her if it was true. We cried, We grieved. We prayed. Many will read this asking to themselves why we had the reaction we did. I was appalled that a country we loved so much could vote on the side of hate, I felt alone. As someone who has been an advocate for equality and justice, constantly calling out white supremacy in all its forms. I kept asking myself where I missed the signs. As a black Muslim immigrant woman, I was scared for myself, I was scared for my family, I was scared for my community, and mostly, I was scared for this country.

Soon however, I began to feel hopeful. We still have the Constitution. We still have checks and balances. There can be no Muslim ban or wall, right? Maybe Donald Trump was pulling the ultimate scam and was actually very socially and fiscally progressive. Soon however, the travel ban (aka Muslim ban) came into play. My home country of Sudan was on the list, along with seven other Muslim majority countries. Grandmothers of friends were detained in airports for hours, not knowing whether they could stay or go, harassed. The country was reeling with fear and anger. While I saw a great deal of hate, I also saw a great deal of love. I saw and participated in protests. I felt validated, heard, seen, wanted. For the first time in a long time, people who looked like me were told we were valued in this country, we were told we have every right to be here. For the first time in a long time, I felt like I belonged. I felt prouder than ever to be a Sudanese-American. To be a hijab-wearing American. To be an American. To be me.”

- Azrah Nasraddin
Scattered throughout the crowd during the Women’s March were signs proclaiming BLACK LIVES MATTER.

- Chicago, IL.
"Planned Parenthood has been a resource for healthcare in my middle class family many times when we did not have insurance coverage. The amount of low-income men and women who will be without access to healthcare from defunding is catastrophic. Restricting access to education and contraceptives will only increase the number of unintended pregnancies, making conservative agendas against Planned Parenthood hopeless. Taking away PP is just another avenue to keep the poor in poverty. It’s time lawmakers stop attributing these actions to ‘traditional values’ and own up to their homophobia, racism, greed, and misogyny."

- Beth Anderson
Shannon K., Mady K., and McKenzie P. (from left to right) pose in front of some anti-Trump political graffiti in an alleyway.

-Iowa City, IA
"The 2016 Presidential election was one that will undoubtedly leave permanent scarring on the American democracy. The nominees of both parties left me, as someone who identifies as a moderate, with little options or choice in finding a candidate that I felt truly represented my views and what I would want leading our country forward. John Kasich was my ideal candidate, but he was written off as "too close to center." I value the center. To me, the center is where the ideas of both parties come together and form functioning policy. There is give, there is take. No more. With one campaign we saw a pandering to the fears of those who felt left behind by the previous administration with no actually policy suggestions to remedy their complaints. On the other side we saw a campaign of elites that couldn’t connect with mainstream America. Where is the middle? I currently don’t see it."

- Dexter Goldberg
The campaign slogan that will go down in history
"For me, this election was about choosing the lesser of two evils, and having more conservative views on topics, Donald Trump was the better option for me. That's not to say I love the guy or agree with everything he's been doing lately - personally I don't think going into countries and bombing them is right - but he was the better choice between the two for me."

- Paul G.
“I voted for Trump because he has proven success in the business world and right now I think the U.S.’s economy should be the main focus of the administration.”

- Ryan A.*

*Subject did not want a photo of his face taken due to his affiliation with his dad’s car dealership business.